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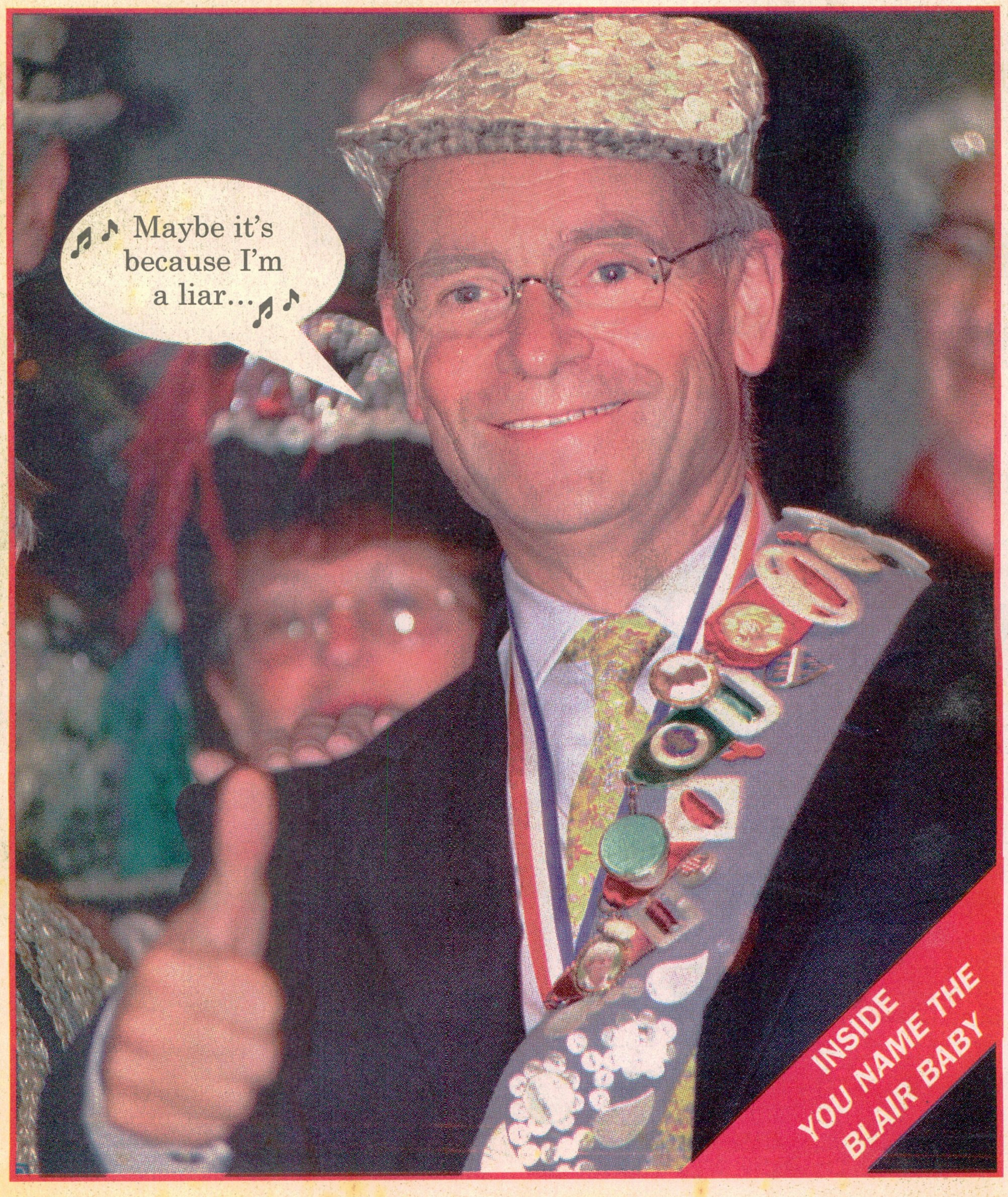

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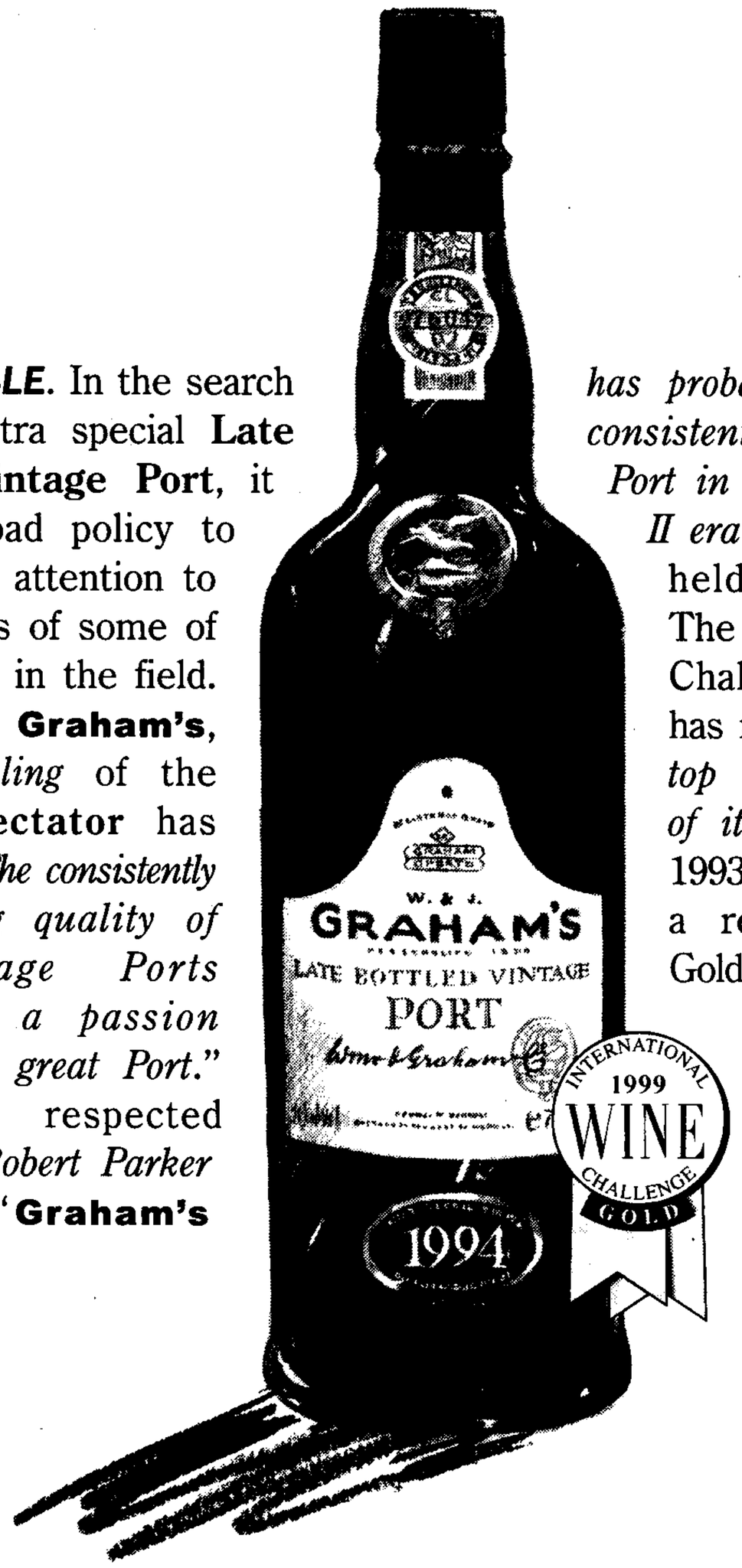

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Gnome

IT IS with deep regret that I have been found out by the media who have hounded me for years, making it impossible for me to carry out my public duties — namely lying, insider dealing, stealing suits in Canada, cheating on my wife and pretending I wrote those terrible books, not to mention paying prostitutes to go abroad.

In the interests of my country, my party and my family, I have therefore decided to be sacked as Conservative candidate for Mayor of London.

I would like to pay tribute to my wife, Lady Fragrance Gnome, who is standing by me with a large croquet mallet.

I would also like to thank Ms Rita Chevrolet for lying both for me and underneath me whenever the occasion demanded.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that all the above statements are almost certainly untrue.

You haven't seen the back of me – because I refused to show it in court.

Yours faithlessly,
The Very Reverend Lord
Professor Dr Gnome PhD (Oxon),
RAC, MSC, BSE, CJD, DVD
(That's enough Bogus Honours. Ed.), The Old Forger,
Grantchester, Scambridge.

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COLOUR SECTION

THE great storyteller Jeffrey Archer's final admission – not only that he is a liar but that he is prepared to procure others to lie and commit perjury for him – may give officials at the Department of Timidity & Inaction (DTI) pause for thought. Certainly more than did trade secretary Stephen Byers' recent request that they consider whether the Anglia Television insider trading investigation should be reopened.

Byers raised that question on the basis of Lord Archer's latest rewriting of history concerning how he came to buy Anglia shares ahead of the 1994 takeover bid from MAI. The purchase made £77,000 in days for Archer's Kurdish chum Broosk Saib off the back of the disgraced peer's broking contacts and cash backing, not to mention "hot" information.

It took but a matter of weeks for the DTI to respond that the latest change in Archer's Anglia shares story did not merit any new investigation.

Hardly a surprising verdict. As stated in the last *Eye*, the missing killer fact which saved Archer from prosecution was that there was no proof that he had inside information before he bought the 50,000 Anglia shares in his Kurdish chum Broosk Saib's name.

He always denied it – but then he would, wouldn't he, in the immortal words of Mandy Rice-Davies from a previous Tory scandal. More importantly so did Archer's fragrant wife Mary – an Anglia director. So too no doubt did his faithful and grateful friend Broosk. None of Archer's changes in story filled that crucial evidential gap.

But now that he has admitted procuring his ex-friend Ted Francis to give him a false alibi for the 1987 Monica Coghlan libel trial, his denials and possibly those of others may be seen in a different and more questioning light. Desperate men do desperate things, and Archer was most certainly desperate over the Anglia affair as was that other Tory liar and friend of ladies of the night, Jonathan Aitken, over his stay at the Ritz Hotel in Paris.

Ironically one of the character references for the British citizenship application of Ritz owner, Aitken accuser and another "habitual liar", the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed, was none other than the great story-teller!

Perhaps the DTI should now consider recalling Saib whose only public comment has been to say enigmatically: "I would love to speak out and clear my name but I dare not at this stage."

Does Saib perhaps have a story similar to that of Francis to tell and sell? Was he perhaps after all not the real recipient of all or any of the £77,000 Anglia profit, the cheque for which went to Archer's home if Saib's bank account? Did he give Archer the inside tip on the MAI bid from one of his City friends and needed Archer's cash and contacts to make the deal, or did Archer have the tip and needed Saib's name as a cover?

If Archer is charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice – even though Francis made no witness statement and gave no evidence in court – there may be very good reason to reexamine his evidence to the DTI inspectors which was given under oath. And will he still now be able to rely on the support of the loyal Mary Archer, who saved his neck at the libel trial and with the DTI, after disclosure of his evening with "close female friend" Andrina Colquhoun?

Meanwhile it is ironic that Archer's nemesis could be Labour peer Lord Hollick. His Express Newspapers have complained to Scotland Yard over Archer's persuading Francis to lie if necessary in the libel action which cost the *Daily Star* £1.2m in damages and costs. Hollick did not own the *Daily Star* in 1987. But he did run MAI when it bid for Anglia and inadvertently enriched Archer (or Saib) a second time.

'Slicker'

● *More Slicker on page 28.*

THOSE ARCHER CLICHES IN FULL

"Lord Archer's life has been more colourful than the plot from any one of his best-selling thrillers." — *Sunday Express*

"Like everything about Archer, the story could have come straight from one of the many best-selling novels." — *Mail on Sunday*

"His exotic life puts into the shade the twists, turns and coincidences that are the meat of his successful potboiler novels." — *Sunday Mirror*

"Even Jeffrey Archer's own best-selling thrillers seemed pale in comparison with this real-life story." — *Observer*

"It is a denouement, one might say, worthy of one of his own novels." — *Sunday Telegraph*

"It could have been a scene from one of his novels." — *Sunday Times*

"'It's too far-fetched for even an Archer novel,' one friend said last night." — *Times*

"A plot line even Jeffrey Archer at his most fanciful would have had trouble concocting." — *Guardian*

"If the master story-teller himself had written such a tale, readers would probably not have believed it." — *Daily Telegraph*

Ian Hislop, Nick Newman, Barry Fantoni, Richard Ingrams and Craig Brown, will be signing copies of:
The 1999 Private Eye Annual
St Albion Parish News *Book Two*
The Craig Brown Omnibus
at DILLONS,
19-23 Oxford Street, W1
on Tuesday 7 December, 1.00pm – 2.00pm
ALSO Ian Hislop will be signing copies at
W H SMITH, Kings Cross Station, N1
on Friday 10 December, 5.30 – 6.30pm
To reserve signed copies contact Dillons on 0171 434 9759 & W H Smith on 0171 837 5580

BLAIR BABY SHOCK!

Street of Shame

GORGEOUS pouting Jenny McCartney of the *Sunday Telegraph* has been filling her column with predictions of doom for David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist party should they not come to their senses.

If she isn't careful, she'll begin to sound worryingly like her father Robert McCartney, the maverick MP who left the Ulster Unionists to set up his own party. Tragically last Saturday's annual conference of his party (sole MP: Bob) was overshadowed by Trimble's prospects, but at least Jenny – whose personality differs markedly from her prickly parent – managed to get the McCartney line across in print.

Meanwhile Eilish O'Hanlon, who fills the Glenda Slagg spot in the *News of the World*'s Irish edition, was also pondering Ulster's future last weekend. Noting the absence of Tony Blair from Stormont, she suggested that if things were really going well he'd have flown in for a quick photo-opportunity. Eilish, who is often perceptive and well-informed, suspected that the IRA would renege on its commitment to hand over weapons.

Although her own political views are very different, Eilish is the niece of veteran IRA man Joe Cahill and the sister of Siobhan O'Hanlon – retired terrorist, regular *Eye* reader and personal assistant to Gerry Adams. It's just possible that, despite writing for the *Screws*, Eilish's understanding of IRA intentions is a touch more accurate than Peter Mandelson's.

CAN shamelesness be inherited genetically? This is the question all Australia is asking following a hilarious outburst from one Lachlan Murdoch, chairman of News Ltd.

Lachlan is furious at a promotional stunt by rival press group Fairfax, which has announced that for every person who takes out a subscription to its *Sydney Morning Herald* it will donate $10 to a local rugby league team, the Souths, which is fighting a legal battle to stay in the National Rugby League (NRL).

Murdoch junior – whose company happens to own half of the NRL – has denounced the marketing exercise as "unethical", and threatened to refer it to the Australian press council. "I've suspected for a long time," he thunders indignantly, "that the *Sydney Morning Herald* and, for that matter, the Fairfax press, has run an editorial line that most benefits their commercial position."

Can it be that they pinched the idea from Lachlan's dad?

IT'S OFFICIAL: no ugly people are to appear on the features pages of the *Daily Mail*.

Editor Paul Dacre has decreed that everyone appearing in his "Femail" section must have a makeover first. So now, whenever photographers are sent out to snap a "case history", they are invariably accompanied by a hair and make-up stylist.

There is one other stipulation: female interviewees must appear in skirts, preferably showing plenty of leg. "The editor's sick of women in trousers," an executive explains. "It's boring. He wants a more feminine look."

Dacre's obedient colleagues are eager to satisfy his desires. Hence a full-page feature last week, simply headlined "Long Live the Skirt!"

GETTING THINGS IN PROPORTION AWARD

EGYPT AIR flight 990 fell into the Atlantic on 31 October, killing all 217 people on board. On that count it must be the worst airline of the year. But the runner-up prize goes to Air Iberia.

When does a three-hour journey take 10 hours? When the carrier is Air Iberia.

PETRONELLA WYATT

(Writing a 1,000 word lament for her lost luggage in The Spectator on 20 November.)

***MIRROR* boss Phil Graf is nursing a battered bank balance after a gamble by Piers Morgan and his legal adviser Martin "Crudface" Cruddace went badly wrong.**

Having inadvertently libelled Dublin business tycoon Denis O'Brien, Morgan decided against making an agreed out-of-court settlement of £60,000. Instead he counted on a jury accepting that O'Brien hadn't really been libelled, and didn't deserve lots of dosh anyway given that he's already a multimillionaire.

Alas! The jury awarded O'Brien £200,000. Worse still, the paper has to pick up all the costs.

Amid general gloom, one newspaper couldn't resist gloating at the *Mirror*'s loss. Dublin's nationalist rag the *Sunday Business Post* headlined its coverage "SHATTERED MIRROR", and lobbed in plenty of jibes about Cruddace's handling of the trial. "It is extremely unlikely," the *Post* opined, "that any Irish newspaper would have fought such a seemingly unwinnable case."

Except that, oddly enough, the *Sunday Business Post* isn't an "Irish newspaper": it's actually a wholly-owned subsidiary of Phil Graf's Trinity Mirror group – and thus the *Daily Mirror*'s sister title!

ALISON BROWN, whose allegations of sexual abuse by Gary Glitter weren't believed by a jury, has unwittingly got a little bit of her own back on the now ex-singer.

Glitter, aka Paul Gadd, was jailed for four months after pleading guilty to downloading porn from the internet and is currently in solitary (without even his wig for company) in Horfield Prison near Bristol.

The prison service was considering moving him to the more relaxed Leyhill open jail in Gloucestershire, former home of Lord Brocket, once the initial burst of publicity subsided. Leyhill houses a larger than usual percentage of sex offenders and therefore has a higher tolerance level of people like Glitter. But Alison Brown's decision to waive her right to anonymity and begin doing the chat shows (under Max Clifford's eagle-eye) has kept the Glitter story in the news meaning, alas, that Paul Francis Gadd will be kept banged-up alone for the foreseeable future.

AN EARLY contender for the David Aaronovitch award for toadying journalism and generally putting the boot in each time Downing Street spin doctor Bill Bush orders it, must be Peter Kellner, *Evening Standard* columnist and BBC *Newsnight* psephologist.

The ever reliable Kellner recently informed readers of the *Standard* that Ken Livingstone had received support from, among others, "the Socialist Workers Party, Ted Knight, and [the Trotskyist] Socialist Organiser" and therefore could not be trusted.

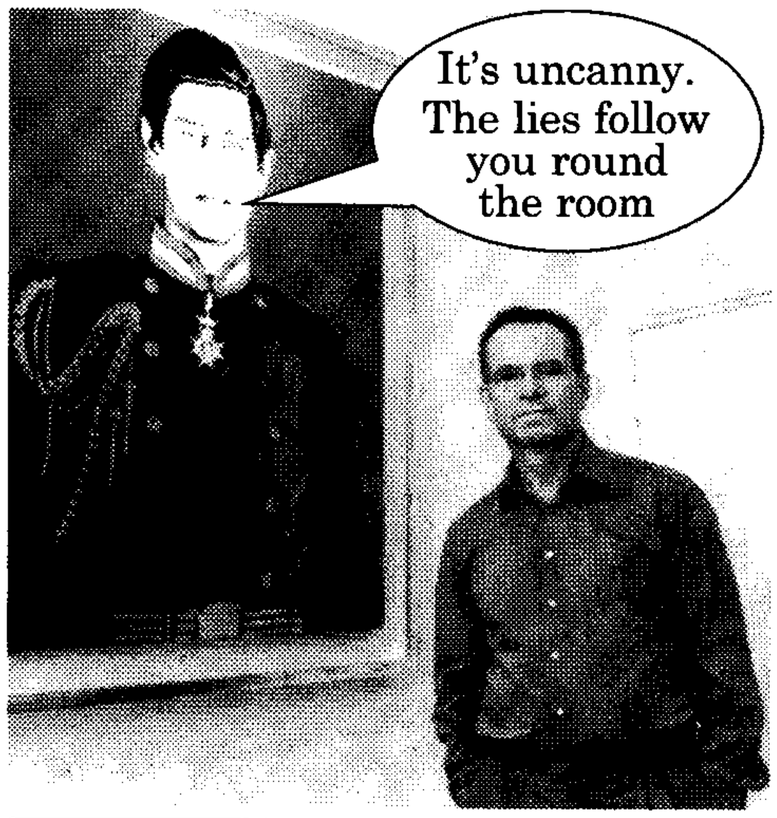
The day before Kellner's pisspoor column appeared, a glossy promotional leaflet for Frank Dobson had begun arriving on the capital's doorsteps. "Consider the people who have said they would like you to vote for Ken Livingstone," it blustered. "They include people such as the Socialist Workers Party, Ted Knight and Socialist Organiser."

JANET STREET-PORTER'S honeymoon as editor of the *Independent on Sunday* is over. Barely four months into the job, a stream of articles rubbishing her performance has appeared in rival newspapers' media pages.

One knocking article in the *Standard* by former *Sindie* editor Peter Wilby, now editor of the *New Statesman*, claimed JS-P had attempted to defy conventional news values by putting the JFK Junior aircrash story on an inside page, but had been persuaded otherwise by the paper's "middle-aged male newspaper pros". Wilby, in fact, got his facts completely wrong: it was the grey men who wanted to downplay the story, while Street-Porter was all for splashing on the dead celebs.

It all looks like Kelner, briefing off-the-record against Street-Porter even sooner than he did against the man she replaced, Kim Fletcher. It is recognised as a standard Kelner technique by colleagues – make sure that the blame for any problems always points elsewhere. But the ploy may not work this time. *Sindie* staff point out that Fletcher and Street-Porter were both Kelner appointments; both have been hobbled by his control of budgets and hiring. To hire one failed editor may be a misfortune – but two, in less than 18 months? That really starts to look like carelessness.

ARCHER PICTURE COLLECTION



THE spirit of Scrooge continues to stalk the corridors of Wapping, where the *Sunday Times* has sadly informed reporters it cannot afford to subsidise their Christmas cheer. The hacks will have to make do with a £12.50 lunch at a Greek caff in Soho on 14 December, for which they are expected to pay themselves.

But lo, what is? On 18 December *Sunday Times* executives will set sail from St Katherine's Pier for a "seasonal celebration" (black-tie dinner-dance with all the trimmings) in the Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich. The bash, at which hacks are not welcome, is being organised by a professional party-planner and will cost News International a modest £100 per couple.

THE *Sun*'s Mike Bull seemed to have a sensational leak from the treasury ahead of Gordon Brown's pre-budget statement on 9 November.

Bull's story of how the chancellor's planned "shares explosion" was going to give "millions a tax-free stake in work" dominated page 2, appeared in the *Sun*'s Comment column and covered four pages of the eight page *Sun Money* supplement that day.

The item was considered so important for *Sun* readers they were offered the chance to "Get the fax on our shares exclusive" via a 50p per minute premium rated fax line. "We've got ALL the details of the chancellor's new shares scheme – and he doesn't even announce it until this afternoon," boasted Bull. Sadly, the employee share ownership scheme had been announced in the March 1999 budget and the small print of the plans had been circulating in a freely available government consultation paper for months. The scoop was literally er, Bull.

INTERNET junkie and inventor of the jigsaw Eternity, Christopher Monckton has put his Scottish mansion up for sale in the same week the game is launched in the US because of unsubstantiated reports on internet news groups that someone is close to solving the puzzle.

Monckton calculated it would take at least three years for anyone to solve the 209 piece puzzle, but now fears that if one person has managed to fit 204 pieces together as reported, he might be forced to pay out £1m in prize money next September.

To sell his house seems somewhat presumptuous, however, considering that 140,000 Eternity puzzles have already been sold at £29.99, grossing over £4m (although how much of this is put into the prize fund remains undisclosed). And who's to say the final five pieces will fit?

HACKWATCH SPECIAL THE SUN

30 Glorious Years

IT IS 30 years since the Dirty Digger got his grubby mitts on the *Sun*, and birthday tributes are pouring into Wapping. Tony Blair praises its sense of fun – "naughty but nice" – and adds that "the *Sun* has made its reputation by informing and entertaining its readers".

Here's what he means:

1969: Rupert Murdoch relaunches the *Sun* under the editorship of Larry Lamb. "The most important thing to remember is that the new *Sun* will be the paper that *cares*," readers are informed. "The paper that cares – passionately – about truth and beauty and justice... And about the kind of world we would like our children to live in."

1970: Readers can at last glimpse the world Larry Lamb wants for his children, as he launches the topless Page Three Girl. "From time to time some self-appointed critic stamps his tiny foot and declares that the *Sun* is obsessed with sex," the paper harrumphs. "It is not the *Sun*, but the critics, who are obsessed."

1972: To mark the paper's second birthday, Lamb prints a pic of Page Three stunner Vivien Neves naked on her hands and knees, in a see-through box wrapped with ribbon.

1977: *Sun* hack John Kay is promoted to industrial correspondent. Distraught at the prospect of having to interview trade union leaders, he goes home and kills his wife. St Albans crown court agrees that his crack-up was an inevitable consequence of being forced to cover industrial affairs for the *Sun*, accepting a plea of guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. After his release, Kay returns to the paper as chief reporter.

1979: In August, the *Sun* cons its readers by running a photo of "octuplets" which is in fact a picture of four babies, printed twice. In the same month the press council condemns the paper's wildly inaccurate coverage of a case involving a Derbyshire woman who killed her baby.

1980: *Sun* editor Larry Lamb, who urged his readers to vote Tory in 1979, is knighted by Margaret Thatcher for "services to journalism".

1981: Sir Larry Lamb is replaced as editor by Kelvin MacKenzie.

1982: In March, the press council accuses the *Sun* of "bringing discredit on the British press" by printing long-lens photos of Princess Diana, five months pregnant, in a bikini. On 4 May, the death of hundreds of young Argentine conscripts in the South Atlantic is reported under the gleeful headline "GOTCHA!" In September, following the death of Princess Grace of Monaco in a car-crash, the paper carries a fictitious "interview" with Princess Stephanie, who is in fact under sedation at the time.

1983: After police in Oxford arrest 286 suspected social security cheats – of whom just four are black or Asian – the *Sun* publishes a cartoon suggesting that the vast majority of them are black. The press council condemns this "offensive" distortion. On 8 August the paper fabricates a "world exclusive" interview with Marica McKay, the widow of a soldier who won a posthumous VC in the Falklands War. The article is denounced by the press council as "a deplorable, insensitive deception on the public".

1984: During the pit strike, Kelvin MacKenzie pens a thoughtful front-page editorial describing coal-miners as "SCUM OF THE EARTH". The press council condemns the *Sun* for printing a long-lens photo of Brigitte Bardot sunbathing topless in her back garden, and delivers an even more scathing verdict on a telephoto shot of David Niven: "The photograph published was a sad and distressing one of Mr David Niven in his own home when he was clearly very seriously, and, it proved, mortally ill... The taking of the picture and its publication were a gross invasion of privacy."

1985: In May the *Sun* establishes a new record by being criticised four times in one month by the press council. Unable to get an interview with Falklands hero Simon Weston, it simply concocts one – and is rebuked once again.

1986: The press council rules that the phrase "Arab pig", used by the *Sun* in a banner front-page headline, was not racist. The paper celebrates with a cartoon showing a group of porkers advancing on Wapping, captioned: "Now the pigs object to being called Arabs." The press council condemns this "tasteless and studiously offensive attack on Arabs in general which amounted to an ugly piece of racism."

1987: "ELTON IN VICE BOYS SCANDAL" the *Sun* reveals exclusively on 25 February. The scoop is based on the false "confessions" of a rentboy. Undaunted, the paper continues running made-up stories about Elton John, culminating in an allegation that he has cut the vocal cords of his Rottweilers to silence them. Alas! Elton John's dogs are in fact Alsatians, and all barking. Not as barking as the *Sun*, however, which has to pay him £1m.

The press council condemns the *Sun* for printing a front-page photo of the young woman who was raped in an Ealing vicarage – "a gross breach of proper conduct by a newspaper". Investigating another *Sun* scoop ("Freebie Trip for Blacks But White Kids Must Pay"), the council finds that "the headline, which was provocative and potentially racially divisive, was unsupported by the story beneath it". In Edinburgh, the high court fines the *Sun*'s Scottish editor £5,000 for contempt of court over his "deplorable" reporting of a murder trial.

1988: The press council reveals that no fewer than 15 complaints against the *Sun* were upheld in the past year, an all-time record for any newspaper. Kelvin MacKenzie adds to the total by running a front-page picture of a baby with two heads – a photo which even the *Daily Star* rejected on the grounds that it was too "tragically revolting". In July, the press council censures an "unacceptably racist" editorial which claimed that all Australian aborigines were "treacherous and brutal". The *Sun* is also fined £75,000 for contempt of court, after conducting a "trial by newspaper" of a doctor charged with rape.

1989: In April, 95 Liverpool fans are crushed to death at Hillsborough. A subsequent official inquiry blames the disaster on incompetent crowd-control by the police. But the *Sun* has other ideas: "THE TRUTH... Drunken Liverpool fans viciously attacked rescue workers as they tried to revive victims... Police officers, firemen and ambulance crew were punched, kicked and urinated upon... Some thugs rifled the pockets of injured fans as they were stretched out unconscious..." Every one of the allegations is false, and the paper's circulation on Merseyside plummets by 40 per cent.

1990: The *Daily Mirror* pays £19,000 to free British lorry-driver Paul Ashwell from a Greek jail, and photographs him wearing a *Mirror* t-shirt. Kelvin MacKenzie steals the picture, airbrushes out the *Mirror* logo, replaces it with the *Sun*'s – and then runs a front-page story claiming the credit for saving the jailed trucker. In August the *Sun* splashes a long-lens photo of Prince Charles with his arm round Lady Romsey, headed: "Charles Hugs His Old Flame. Prince shares tender moments with lovely Penny beside pool." Far from canoodling, the prince was actually consoling her: the photo had been taken moments after Penny told Charles that her four-year-old daughter had cancer. The press council issues a thunderous indictment of this "gross offence".

1991: Another first, as the *Sun* pays £35,000 libel damages to a severely disabled five-year-old boy whom it had branded "the worst brat in Britain". The boy was dubbed a "terror tot" whose exploits included "cutting off his own ear and killing the cat". In fact, he had done nothing of the kind. Meanwhile, the *Sun* does its bit for the war effort by setting up a Gulf phoneline for worried relations of British troops – at 44p a minute peak rate. When MPs denounce this blatant attempt to cash in, the paper promises to donate the proceeds to charity. But the charity turns out to be the *Sun* itself: profits will "go towards providing free weekly copies of the *Sun* for our Gulf heroes".

1992: Election year. "If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights." When Kinnock duly loses, the paper is quick to claim all the credit: "It's the *Sun* Wot Won It! Triumphant MPs were queuing yesterday to say 'Thank you, my *Sun*'." A couple of days later, however, this is mysteriously forgotten. "Bad loser Neil Kinnock stepped down as Labour leader yesterday – with one final whinge," it reports. "He blamed his defeat on press coverage... A *Sun* spokesman said: 'Neil Kinnock's claim that the press cost him victory is an insult to the intelligence'."

1993: In June the paper has to apologise for faking a front-page photo. Meanwhile, a high court judge frees two sisters, Michelle and Lisa Taylor, after deciding that the *Sun*'s "sensational, inaccurate and misleading" reporting of their murder trial could have led to a wrongful conviction. "It was not reporting at all," he says. "It was comment, and comment which assumed guilt."

1994: The *Sun* is fined a record £100,000 for publishing a photograph of an accused man shortly before an identity parade. "The scale of the penalties must mark the seriousness of the contempt," Lord Justice Steyn declares. *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn reveals his own contempt for newspapers which carry foreign stories: "Does anyone really give a monkey's about what happens in Rwanda? If the Mbongo tribe wants to wipe out the Mbango tribe then as far as I am concerned that is entirely a matter for them." The piece is headed: "No Zulus Is Good News."

1996: Rupert Murdoch abandons a planned tie-up with Scottish Courage to produce a "*Sun* lager" because he fears that it will give his newspaper "a lager-lout image". A *Sun* credit card proves an expensive flop when only 46,000 of the 10 million readers apply for one, and two-thirds of the applications from *Sun* readers are rejected anyway because of "poor credit rating". There is more embarrassment in October following a "*Sun* Royal World Exclusive" which shows video-pictures of Princess Diana and a lover enjoying steamy romps. The videotape, for which editor Stuart Higgins paid £100,000, turns out to be a crudely made hoax.

1998: While Garry Bushell launches an "inqueery" into "limp-wristed" politicians, the *Sun* asks: "Is Britain being run by a gay Mafia?... The public has a right to know how many homosexuals occupy positions of high power." Four days later, however, the paper announces that it deplores the "outing" of prominent gays – and sacks its columnist Matthew Parris for having mentioned Peter Mandelson's sexuality.

1999: Three weeks before her wedding, the *Sun* prints a topless photo of Sophie Rhys-Jones. The Queen accuses editor David Yelland of "premeditated cruelty". Yelland insists that "it was never our intention to spoil Sophie's joy over her forthcoming marriage". When the press complaints commission describes his contrition as "worthless", Yelland tries again: "I reiterate my apology to all those involved... Let's move on."

Onwards indeed – but not necessarily upwards...

OH, YEAH?

The event [Miss World Contest] returned to Britain for the first time in 10 years with organisers insisting it is all about female empowerment and not about who looks good in a bikini or wants to do charity work with orphaned animals... "The judges are not looking for the most beautiful girl in the world with the greatest figure, but the most beautiful of those who have talent and personality".

— Reuters, 16 November

WHEN Ken Livingstone appeared before the London Labour party selection panel on Tuesday afternoon in Millbank Tower, following Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson, he was in chipper mood.

He had good reason to believe that "new" Labour's Court of the Star Chamber was not under direct orders from Tony Blair to block his candidature. In this, Leninspart was right; for in cabinet his fiercest opponents are Gordon Brown and John Prescott.

St Tony on the other hand was caught between his cabinet and Millbank furies and the focus group polling peddled by Philip Gould during his weekly brainstorming with the PM. This showed that Leninspart was a) popular among Londoners and b) that St Tony, though still quite popular among Londoners, would soon become very unpopular if he banned Red Ken.

As the selection panel gathered, still awaiting orders, parliamentary Labour party chairman Clive Soley MP and Prescott trustee Ian McCartney MP became alarmed at Leninspart's casual attitude to their probing questions. McCartney, regarded as Prescott's "brains", was infuriated by Leninspart's refusal to guarantee never to launch another attack on the chancellor.

One panel member subsequently claimed that when challenged Livingstone said of Brown: "If you think that's bad, you should hear what I say about him when he is not around!" But it was Livingstone's failure to sign up for Prescott's plans for a "Public Private Finance" for the London Underground in any London Labour manifesto that had McCartney and Soley fuming, while Tony was left kicking his heels in Number 10, furious that no decision had been arrived at.

Finally Livingstone was ordered to appear before the panel again on Thursday. After nearly six hours' interrogation, during which McCartney repeatedly attempted to force Livingstone to sign up to a paragraph which included a promise, subsequently repeatedly refashioned in a vain attempt to pin the wily Leninspart down, to support "John Prescott's policy of a PPP [public private partnership] for the London Underground", the inquisitors finally gave up. Leninspart was free to campaign against Prezza's partial privatisation plans, but had agreed to be bound by the eventual London Labour Manifesto.

Unfortunately for Leninspart, even as he was celebrating his victory over the forces of darkness, a "draft manifesto" was in the process of being mailed out which committed any Labour Mayor to, er, PPP for the London Underground.

JOHN PRESCOTT's enthusiasm for Railtrack (he wants it to run the District and Circle lines) and his support for former treasury minister Geoffrey Robinson's glorified private finance initiative (PFI) solution for the London Underground, surprise many of his once loyal fans.

They recall Prezza in sparkling form four years ago as he sought to reassure Labour party members that his support for the Dear Leader's plan to rewrite clause four of Labour's constitution did not mean an abandonment of public ownership (presumably because Tony had promised him as much). "I am in favour of public ownership and the concept of clause four", wrote Prezza on 17 January 1995 in a standard letter sent to the many concerned inquirers. "I think this has been evident *with the rail* privatisation where we have made it clear if the railways are to be privatisede [*sic*] we will return them to a publicly owned, publicly accountable, railways system,."[*sic*]

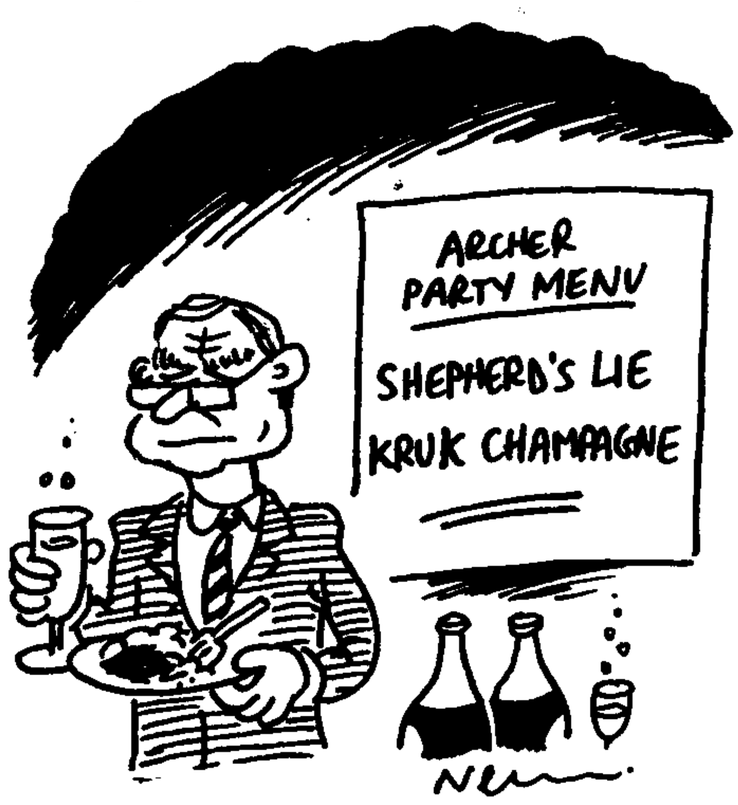
IT SEEMS Lord Irvine is not the only legal-wallah in Whitehall with a penchant for expensive refurbishments.

On taking up his job as official solicitor, Lawrence Oates's first act was to authorise the purchase of a new desk and chairs for his office. The cost? £18,765.30, including VAT.

THE handful of remaining parliamentarians who a) have minds of their own and b) are appalled by the government's thinly disguised contempt for the House of Commons gathered on the evening of 9 November to listen to veteran Labour MP Tony Benn speak from the backbenches.

The Bennattollah made a series of heartfelt pleas for the rights of parliamentarians to be taken seriously, while also asking that MPs be released from the tyranny of the party whips to vote with their conscience more often. As Benn's peroration reached its powerful climax, the attention of Labour and Tory backbenchers alike was drawn to the shocking antics of thuggish Labour whip Jim Dowd.

The apparently tired and emotional MP was aggressively gesturing towards Gerald Howarth, right wing Tory backbencher and general bag carrier to disgraced former MP Neil Hamilton. As Howarth took up Dowd's thoughtful invitation and advanced towards the menacing former Militant supporter, Dowd proceeded to wag his finger in Howarth's face. At which point Howarth retreated.



THE quiet dignity of events at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday hid a lot of behind-the-scenes turmoil. With the Queen and Tony Blair on Commonwealth duty in South Africa, Prince Charles and John Prescott stepped blinking into the limelight.

It was therefore infuriating for Charles's PR men that Princess Beatrice should decide to faint in the middle of the ceremony, giving hacks a new angle on the event and ensuring Charles got minimal coverage of his big day. St James's Palace insiders are wryly saying Buck House must have spiked Beatrice's Coke to stop Charles enjoying his rare chance to practise being monarch.

Meanwhile Prezza, no good at stiff upper lips but a master at wobbling chins, was silently fuming. While hanging around in the foreign office waiting to step out into Whitehall he caught sight of a mischievous note scribbled on a clipboard carried by a Downing St flunky. "Will DPM manage 10 paces to lay wreath without Jag?!" Now you know why he looked like he'd done 10 rounds with John Humphrys before breakfast.

GORDON BROWN's pre-budget statement may have disappointed pensioners for again failing to link pensions to earnings, but this has not stopped some of the chancellor's cabinet colleagues from muscling in on Brown's earlier "generosity" to pensioners in the form of extra fuel payments.

Labour MPs are still chortling at the letter they received asking them to put forward a local pensioner to be "photographed" with social security minister Alistair Darling receiving a mock "£100 cheque". The said pensioners "must be presentable" read the missive and sadly "no autographs" would be available from the minister.

OH, YEAH?

The company responsible for the Millennium Dome has laid off 36 workers at its ticket call centre after a drop in demand. "The number of telesales staff at any one time is not an indicator of how well sales are going," a spokesman said last night.

— *The Times, 18 November*

ONE document in the archives of Kensington and Chelsea Conservative Association will be of particular interest to their new prospective parliamentary candidate Michael Portillo: the response to a questionnaire sent out last year as part of the Tories' "Listening to Britain" campaign.

The survey, sent to 2,500 association members, received just over 600 responses to multiple choice questions about the state of the party.

Members were asked to indicate how they thought the Tories could improve their appeal to the electorate. The options included having a higher profile with the media, giving more information on what Labour is doing wrong, making stronger attacks on Labour/Liberal Democrats and/or displaying more unity and discipline among Conservative MPs.

While the vast majority opted for the latter (the four were not mutually exclusive), a considerable number of respondents provided an unsolicited solution in the space marked "other". Their cunning plan? Change the leader.

AT THE merest nod from Labour high command Scotland's first minister Donald Dewar hot-footed it down to Westminster to vote with the government on Alistair Darling's less-than-popular welfare reform and pensions bill.

Such obeisance is a far cry from the days in opposition when Labour professed itself to be somewhat more caring about the plight of the elderly and disabled. In 1995 the Labour shadow social security minister lambasted the Tories for making budget cuts in the DSS, saying: "You cannot take £1500m from the budget for the long-term sick and disabled without hitting many vulnerable people hard."

Who was the shadow minister in question? Step forward... Donald Dewar.

MANY congratulations to Lord Carrington on accepting a life peerage: it is will deserved.

In the 1950s, as junior minister at the department of agriculture, Carrington was involved in the Crichel Down scandal which led to the resignation of his boss, Sir Thomas Dugdale – who was not involved at all. In the 1980s, Carrington himself resigned as foreign secretary following the Falklands invasion. In the 1990s, he was a notably useless "international mediator" in Bosnia.

However, his new incarnation may surprise readers of the *Guards Magazine*, which interviewed his lordship earlier this year. Asked if he hoped to carry on in the Upper House after the abolition of hereditaries, Carrington replied: "I can't think of anything more awful!"

AS PART of their ceaseless quest for lobby-fodder in the Upper House, apparatchiks at 10 Downing Street recently rang Ben Whitaker, the former MP and veteran human-rights campaigner, to ask if he would accept a peerage.

Whitaker's wife Janet, who took the call, said she very much doubted it. Five minutes later, Downing Street was back on the line. "All right then, will *you* accept one?"

And so it was that, earlier this month, one Baroness Whitaker took up her seat in the House of Lords.

WEST Lancashire MP Colin Pickthall, parliamentary private secretary to home secretary Jack Straw, has written to local Labour party members to reassure them the party's north-west regional office has given his 1997 return of general election expenses "a clean bill of health".

Yet that return, as revealed in *Eye* 989, contained receipts bearing forged signatures. It was prepared by Thickpall's former agent, Lancs county councillor Frank McKenna, who has ambitions to become an MP himself, and witnessed by West Lancashire district councillor Jean White, who is a magistrate.

Last week the *Eye* asked Pickthall and the north-west region of the Labour party:

- Assuming that you do not condone forgery, can you give any explanation how forged signatures came to appear in the return of election expenses, and why?
- What steps have been taken to investigate who might have forged those signatures?
- Have you made a complaint to the police about this very serious matter?

We are still waiting for a reply.

Peter Mandelson enjoys a close relationship with the prime minister

BBC Website

EVEN Britain's defence establishment seems to have no defence against the advances of the world's worst computer company, EDS (see *Eyes passim ad infinitum*).

EDS has several contracts with the armed forces, but owing to "commercial confidentiality" the ministry of defence is not forthcoming with details. A small clue, however, did emerge in the summer edition of *The Officer* magazine concerning, ahem, arrears in soldiers' pay slips earlier in the year.

"The Adjutant General has sent a signal to all soldiers, describing widespread arrears in their pay slips as 'totally unacceptable'. Pressure is being brought to bear on the Armed Forces Pay and Administration Agency and on Electronic Data Systems to rectify the situation 'as soon as possible'."

The MoD attributed the problem to a run on pay at the end of the month – a not exactly unusual time for people to be paid. Could the real cause of delay have anything to do with the armed forces' new computerised pay system EDS is currently working on?

***EXPRESS* editor Rosie Boycott enjoyed her recent weekend with Tony and Cherie at Chequers – especially when the PM started discussing the House of Lords.**

"When we devise our reformed second chamber," he inquired, "would you like to be in it, Rosie?" It transpired that the fearlesely independent editrix would like the idea very much indeed.

'Backbiter'

BAHRAIN DRAIN

THE official state visit to Britain of the amir of Bahrain on 22 to 25 November was handled with the same grovelling arslikhan that Buckingham Palace and the foreign office recently showed China, another dictatorship. And no wonder: parliamentary government on the island of Bahrain was abolished in a coup in 1975, and the amir and his family have ruled by terror and torture ever since.

Eye readers are well acquainted with the amir's biggest fan in the House of Commons, Ken Purchase, Labour MP for Wolverhampton North East. Last month Purchase – "the MP who can't be bought", as the *Eye* dubbed him last year – led yet another group of MPs on a sumptuous all-expenses-paid freebie to Manama, Bahrain's capital.

The bill was met as usual by the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, whose ubiquitous director Omar Al Hassan was exposed in the *Eye* five years ago as the source of undeclared monthly payments of £500 a month to a Tory MP. With Purchase on the delegation were Patrick Nicholls (Tory, Teignbridge); Brian Iddon (Labour, Bolton South West); Roy Beggs (Ulster Unionist, North Antrim); and Alice Mahon (Labour, Halifax).

Mr Purchase accepted an invitation to write an article for *Akhbar Al Khaleej*, a newspaper which supports the Bahrain dictatorship (if it doesn't, it will be closed down – its editor is a member of the ruling Shura council). Without mentioning the hundreds of political prisoners in Bahrain, Purchase's article praised the "courageous decision of His Highness the Amir to pardon prisoners accused of sabotage".

His nose by now so brown that to retreat from the amir's backside was as nasty as to press on, Purchase went on to say how much the delegation was impressed by "the level of social and economic progress" in Bahrain. His article ended by noting the difference in the image of the Bahrain the delegation was privileged to be shown and the picture painted by "a few in Britain".

One member of the House of Lords, Lord Avebury, secretary of the Parliamentary human rights group, was singled out for special criticism by Purchase.

Avebury replied to this article, but until now there has been no reply from Mr Purchase. This is slightly odd because Purchase is parliamentary private secretary to the very ethical foreign secretary Robin Cook.

ROUGH LUCK

POACHER turned gamekeeper Louise Casey (formerly of Shelter; now head of the government's rough sleepers' unit) believes the homeless stay freezing on the streets risking robbery, assault and abuse because they might get the odd sandwich, bowl of soup or sleeping bag.

She believes help should be given inside shelters; which might be fine if shelters were a safe and ready option. But they are not.

Take the case of David (not his real name), a 27 year old forced on to the streets after he broke up with his girlfriend, fell behind with his rent and was evicted. With no family to turn to, he went to Putney Citizens Advice Bureau, where advice worker and Westminster city councillor Gary Martin tried to find him a bed for the night.

First Mr Martin rang Shelter Nightline. It referred him to homeless charity St Mungo's outreach team, which gave him a number for a hostel in central London that, apparently, had vacancies. But David didn't qualify: he was neither old nor drunk enough, the shelter being for older heavy drinkers.

The hostel manager said he would get someone else to call Mr Martin back with other options. Eventually St Mungo's called back to say it could find no vacancies anywhere and that Mr Martin should try Shelter Nightline – exactly where he had started his futile search. By this time David had walked out, no doubt to bag his usual place in the local car park hoping some compassionate person might help him get through the cold night with a bowl of soup.

NOOKS and CORNERS

EDINBURGH Zoo has an ideal, beautiful site. The Zoological Society of Scotland acquired the Corstophine Hill House estate in 1913 and the 82 acres of grounds were then laid out by the great sociologist and planner, Patrick Geddes, and F.C. Mears.

They rise from the Corstorphine Road to a wooded hilltop which affords a magnificent panorama of "The Most Romantic City in the World" (James Pryde). Edinburgh Zoo may not be able to boast the cranky buildings that make Dudley or Antwerp Zoos, say, so interesting; but it has a fine and witty new penguin pool and a baronial house in the middle. The zoo is a short distance from the centre of Edinburgh by bus and is altogether a most agreeable place.

But it is not good enough for Dr David Waugh, the whizzy new director, who proposes to cash in on the dramatic rise in house prices following the establishment of the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh. Why not sell the site for a housing development and move the zoo way out to a new theme park at Hermiston, where David Murray, yet another football tycoon, has been amassing green belt land in anticipation of development? Given the way Edinburgh council looks after the city, this might just happen.

Building the absurd new parliament opposite Holyrood by the undemocratic decision of Donald Dewar is bad enough, but the council is actively promoting a monstrous scheme for a shopping centre under the length of Princes Street while encouraging other development out at South Gyle, so decentralising what used to be a supremely urbane walkable city. Poor old Auld Reekie: perhaps Edinburgh was better off when it was staid and boring and narrow and backward and one of the wonders of Europe. The zoo should stay where it is.

THINKING of animals, I see it is proposed to erect an "Animals in War Memorial" at Hyde Park Corner. I suppose this was inevitable, what with England's long standing preference for our furry friends over people which has now reached such an hysterical pitch of misanthropy and anthropomorphic sentimentality. This, combined with Britain's continuing obsession with the second world war as national and moral self-justification, has evidently made it irresistible.

So a committee has been formed consisting of major generals and colonels, plus Jilly Cooper, with Brigadier Andrew Parker Bowles as vice chairman, to raise a "monumental memorial... which reflects the important contribution made in [the] wars [of the 20th century] by a wide variety of animals from elephants mules and camels to horses dogs and pigeons which supported our forces and died for the nation." Never mind, I suppose, that they didn't actually know they were dying for the nation — or did they? Who knows?

Anyway, I suppose a bronze menagerie could make us laugh and might even enliven London if it were placed next to, say, that ridiculous statue of Mountbatten by St James Park or in front of Bomber Harris, as both reflect the abysmal depths to which the art of public monumental sculpture has sunk. Besides, it couldn't be worse than Maggie Hambling's unfortunate Oscar Wilde, could it?

But no: they want to put it at Hyde Park Corner next to the Wellington Arch and right opposite the Artillery Memorial, that most sublime and moving of London war memorials with its searingly unsentimental figures and friezes by Charles Sargeant Jagger — arguably one of the finest works of public art in Britain.

The committee, in its wisdom, has chosen as sculptor one David Backhouse, despite the fact that its expert advisers recommended Michael Sandle and that Westminster council considers Backhouse's proposal unsuitable for the site. Yet Backhouse was allowed to submit new models after the closing date of the competition and has collaborated with the architect advising the Animals in War committee. Rum. Or should I say foxy?

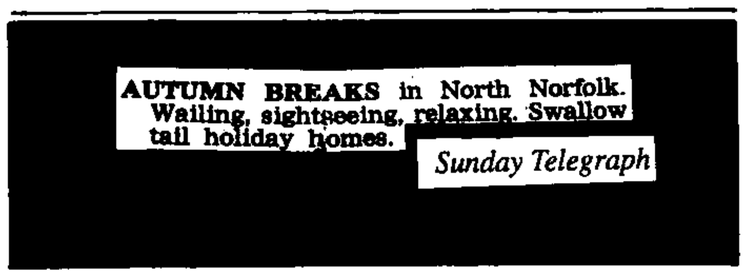
I know nothing of Backhouse: perhaps he is frightfully good at pigeons. But I do know that this is not the way to interfere with one of the most important and sensitive sites in London.

IN OUR considerable wisdom, we once gave the Hugh Casson Award to the new law faculty at Cambridge University by Norman Foster & Partners, while pointing out a few shortcomings in the design: like noise from the canteen disturbing students trying to read books because the floors stop short of the sloping glass walls.

Now a four-storey high glass screen has been inserted which has "significantly reduced" the problem without solving it. And, guess what? The architects have paid £150,000 of the £250,000 cost incurred. They have also carried out £350,000 worth of "re-modelling work" on the offices and lecture theatre in this £12m structure. "All differences have been amicably resolved," said a spokesperson for My Lord Foster; "The building is one of which the university is very proud," added a Cambridge spokesperson.

Really? It seems to me the remedial work calls into question the logic and, indeed, the sanity of the original brilliant design concept. Indeed, it merely confirms what I argued, that the structure is self-evidently absurd. But such is our "new" Labour obsession with High Tec, and our adulation for benighted and ennobled superstar architects, that no criticism and no failings affect their stratospheric reputations and arrogance — not the dispute with the German government over the Reichstag dome, nor using a French stone instead of Portland at the British Museum. Now I hear that windows are falling from My Lord Foster's new glass Social Studies Faculty building for Oxford University in Manor Road. A candidate for this year's Casson Award, perhaps?

'Piloti'



ITV

Peak Practice (ITV)
Dangerfield (BBC1)

MANY drama series start, several flourish briefly, and a rare few just go on and on and on. After a while it seems nothing will stop them. Cast members may leave or even die, but the series always survives. If a vast meteor hit the Earth tomorrow and destroyed all life, the final gasp of the last functioning BBC computer would be to commission a new series of *Casualty*. There's no saying it wouldn't be made, either.

Over at ITV Network Centre, where flint-eyed men in suits spit on the carcass of public service broadcasting, such series are what they want more than anything, other than possibly a seventh weekly episode of *Coronation Street*.

One can only imagine the gloom and despondency when *Soldier Soldier* was finally decomissioned after about its 35th season, but *London's Burning* is still aflame, even though Blue Watch has now put out every building on its patch at least five times. *Heartbeat* is on the mend after Nick Berry's departure, while **Peak Practice**, the everyday story of well-groomed medical folk in the scenic Derbyshire countryside, is beginning to look like the healthiest format of them all.

Every Tuesday, for six months of the year, its loyal audience (nine million or so, many of them visibly drooling) tune in to watch essentially the same episode over and over again. There is no reason it should ever stop, and little chance of it ever doing so.

The cast, of course, is ever changing. Years ago, when tomatoes still tasted like tomatoes, Kevin Whateley and Amanda Burton were the stars and Simon Shepherd took the all-important Third Doctor role (the troubled one who usually drives a fast car). Cases were cured, doctors (we were frequently told) worked terribly hard and everyone lived in chintzy little cottages full of pale-coloured sofas no one would ever buy in real life.

Soon Whateley and Burton fled screaming and Shepherd was promoted to lead. Since then a succession of impossibly clean-cut medics have come and gone, several in car accidents. The latest incumbents are Gary Mavers, a Liverpudlian dreamboat of no fixed eyebrow, Haydn Gwynne, formerly of *Drop The Dead Donkey*, and Another Man With Floppy Hair. But the theme music remains the same, as do all the plots.

Last week, for example, we had the one about the woman who couldn't get an operation because she was too fat. The consultant would have none of it. "Given the overwhelming risk to her during surgery," he told Floppy Hair, "I am not prepared to give the go-ahead for the operation at this juncture." Hard to imagine that anyone actually wrote this line, although it's the "at this juncture" that really makes it unsayable.

Other peachy interchanges included one between Gwynne and her irritable partner ("I just mean you deserve some time off." "Time off from my problems, you mean.") and the scene in which the fat woman, hospitalised after a heart attack, had to say, "You've got no idea what it's like being me." The actors battled bravely against such lines, and generally lost. Why wasn't the script rewritten until it sounded like spoken English? Because no one cared enough, because there wasn't enough money, because it wasn't necessary. Nine million viewers sucking on rusks can't be wrong.

Dangerfield is planned along similar populist lines, but like so many BBC drama series it's less certain in tone, less shameless in content. It doesn't help that the man who played Dangerfield has long since left the series, to be replaced by ageless smoothie Nigel Havers.

Of the many roles you can see Havers playing – smoothie aristocrat, smoothie fighter pilot – a smoothie police surgeon in Warwickshire is not one of them. Even so, this week Dr Havers was kidnapped in fine style before the credits and delivered to his own stag party, which was full of the sort of grunty beer-swilling types the real Havers would no doubt travel far to avoid. To provide counterpoint to this frothy scenario a small boy was genuinely kidnapped, bound and gagged and left in a wood – just the sort of vaguely exploitative plotline a show like this needs to maintain its gritty credentials.

The two plots (wedding and violent abduction) continued in tandem, with all notions of believability long since left behind. "This one's a pro," said the token black detective of the child abductor. "This one's a heap of old cobblers," said the token viewer, finally losing patience.

Dangerfield, perhaps surprisingly, has been struggling in the ratings this time, despite the will-they-won't-they-of-course-they-will romance between the two leads. But *Peak Practice* just chunters along, complacent in its mediocrity and consistent in its apparently awesome profitability. That meteor really can't arrive soon enough.

'Couch Potato'

"I see you have opted for the contemplative life"

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Dylan Thomas
The Tank Engine

MEDIA NEWS

BBC RESOURCES, the ready-for-sell-off wholly owned subsidiary of the BBC, is losing yet more of its core BBC business thanks again to John Birt's internal market.

When Radio News was turfed out of Broadcasting House to make way for the swanky new "Corporate Centre", Resources bid for the contract to provide technical support for all the TVs, videos and radios being installed in new suites there.

With debts estimated at around £10m, you need all the contracts you can get. So imagine Resources' horror when it lost the bid to Technical Support Services, another BBC department.

Technical Support doesn't have the overheads only a vast tier of managers can supply and, also unlike Resources, it doesn't have to show a profit for its Beeb work and, hey presto, is thus considerably cheaper.

Meanwhile, Resources is about to create even bigger overheads for itself thanks to the "consultancy practice" it is developing to "advise" broadcasters on "broadcast technology and organisational matters".

From next year a handpicked team of 12 will launch the scheme at a convention in Las Vegas (thanks, licence-payers!) and recruit a further 50 to 75 more suits after that. Their mission? "To advise clients on how they could develop their businesses" – a key Reithian principle. Not.

The expansion has led to important changes in management structure: "The Project Management Services team within Resources – within which the new practice is being set up – will be renamed Consulting and Projects (C&P)." Naturally these high-flyers are so expert in their chosen field, according to BBC propaganda rag, *Ariel*, that "they will embark on an intensive training programme" as soon as they arrive.

THE decline of Talk Radio's audience (see *Eyes passim*) has become full-blown collapse: nearly a quarter of listeners defected over the summer and many more have gone since then.

Meanwhile Kelvin Mackenzie is having to endure ludicrous rumours spread by jealous rivals at the BBC that for cost reasons Talk's "live" soccer commentaries are often done in the studio, with commentators watching Sky television pictures while pretending to be at the ground.

These evil lies hardly bother Rupert Murdoch, who is effectively acting as guarantor while Kelvin repeats the success of his L!VE TV (RIP) on radio. But they're bad news for other broadcasters. Not only has Talk pushed up the cost of sporting events like boxing by bidding against Radio 5 and local stations, but it is ruining the industry's reputation for competence. So steep is Talk's audience slide it has actually cut the entire commercial sector's market share, reducing the amount advertisers are prepared to pay for packages.

Talk is also part of the new Digital One service which launched last week, and its performance will not encourage perspective listeners to spend £500 on new digital receivers.

BACK in 1995 the BBC told the Royal British Legion what it could do with its suggestion that the nation should start observing a two-minute silence on Armistice Day. Today Auntie has become an enthusiastic supporter of it – so much so that Radio 4's continuity department went over-the-top when publicising it.

Faced with the task of producing more and more programme trails (or "ads" as they are known elsewhere) continuity has little time to fine-tune these pieces and the one for Armistice Day began by calling it "the most solemn day of the year".

Oops! A BBC governor phoned in from home wanting to know why Remembrance Sunday had suddenly been demoted. Even *The Archers* has to be moved on Remembrance Sunday. BBC Religion (not a department dedicated to the worship of John Birt) questioned where Good Friday came in the new scheme of things.

The trail was discreetly dropped but James Boyle, R4's controller, at least proved some of his critics wrong as a result of the debacle: people do listen to those trails.

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DESPERATE for a follow-up to its "exclusive" on how Channel 4's undercover reporter had been "branded" by animal rights fanatics, the *Mail on Sunday* has found another highly reliable source.

One Michael Roberts, founder of a campaign against live-animal exports, reveals to the paper that the idea of branding enemies of the cause was proposed to him four years ago by David Hammond of the Animal Liberation Front. "It shocked me to the core," Roberts claims.

Hammond, who has denied the allegation, is certainly no angel. But then nor is Roberts. Although the *Mail* neglected to mention it, he has a long and distinguished career as a shopbreaker and burglar, starting from the tender age of 12. A few years later Roberts had graduated to stealing from church offertory boxes, attempted arson at his school and assault.

Over subsequent decades Roberts amassed more than 40 convictions – including a five-year sentence for receiving £1.5m worth of stolen paintings from the notorious Dulwich College heist in 1967, and a further seven years for burglary in 1971. He has also been convicted of obtaining money by false pretences and making false representations to obtain benefit.

The *Mail* clearly has the utmost faith in his veracity – and his abhorrence of violence, even though in May 1997 Roberts was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for firebombing a pub and endangering lives. The trial at Sussex crown court, which lasted seven months and cost the taxpayer £2m, relied on 900 witness statements and 4,000 exhibits. The detective in charge of the case said "it was frightening stuff, the stuff of terrorism".

The key prosecution witness, a young woman, was subjected afterwards to a merciless campaign of terror and had to go into hiding, where she remains to this day. The conversations she had secretly recorded included Roberts making plans to bomb a Brighton hotel, murder someone investigating him for alleged charity fraud, use a local mercenary to steal a mine from a naval base and sink a live-calf export ship.

Roberts spent 18 months in jail before he won his appeal on a technicality. Bizarrely, he had been charged with conspiracy to cause criminal damage but had actually been tried and convicted of arson. The mix-up got him off the hook.

Doubtless the *Mail on Sunday*'s lawyers took all this into account before deciding to run with their brilliant "scoop".

LESS than a year since the revamp of *Channel Four News* promised "to smash the package" – and to to replace pre-prepared features with more live interviews – station chiefs have decided the programme needs a facelift.

At a recent meeting Tim Gardam, head of programmes, and David Lloyd, head of news and current affairs, outlined new proposals focusing on the news as "the DNA of the channel".

Not only did they visualise a news programme whose primary aim is to get up the nose of the prime minister's press secretary Alastair Campbell, they also pushed for more analysis provided by ten minute, er, packages.

FOCUS ON TV SCIENCE

DUMBING down at the BBC and Channel 4 is proceeding on schedule, with science programmes going the same way as arts coverage.

At a recent London conference Alan Bookbinder, producer of *The Human Body*, announced to a startled audience of international science producers that inside the BBC science department the most important consideration in offering up programme ideas were three initials W.F.A. – standing for *Wow! Fuck! Aaaah!*

One or two such reactions would get you some way towards a budget and a commission from a channel controller. Three guarantee it. Whether or not the assembled Latvians, Japanese and Austrians saw this as an example of the famed British sense of humour, it was clear Bookbinder was serious.

After the success of *Walking With Dinosaurs*, from the same department, it is difficult to see any future for programmes about serious scientific topics that cannot guarantee a major audience share.

Sometimes regular series like *Equinox* and *Horizon* fail even to pay lip service to the idea that they deal with science. A *Horizon* called *The computer that ate Hollywood*, about visual effects in the movies, was little more than a plug for the film *Titanic*. From Viagra to Ice Mummies, Crashing Comets to Magic Bullets, Siamese Twins to Noah's Flood, television executives scour the more sensational reaches of science to find topics that can generate an eye-catching tabloid title.

These ideas are all "sexy" in television parlance. And sometimes the word can be used literally in the context of science programmes. Here's a recent quote from Horizon on a BBC website: "Turned on by Danger – Profile of the extraordinary life of Polly Matzinger, sheep-dog trainer, Playboy bunny and now leading immunologist with a theory that is revolutionising medicine." Hands up anyone who thinks Ms Matzinger's work would have been of the slightest interest to *Horizon* if she had not been a Playboy bunny.

A recent *Equinox*, claimed by its producer at the science producers' conference to be about what he called "junk science", took as its theme silicon breast implants. The alleged "junk science" here was the scientific data that suggested that silicon breast implants have been responsible for a number of adverse reactions in women who had the operation. (Presumably the *real* science was the research funded by the manufacturer of the implants which showed there was no adverse effect.)

Would this programme have been commissioned at all if it had been about, say, the pros and cons of synthetic heart valves? As it was, the film was larded with semi-naked women, both implant patients and models, sometimes cutting them every few seconds into the middle of a perfectly serious scientific interview.

Another producer told the conference how he had been pressured by Channel 4 to broaden his approach to a major technological topic, the International Space Station. In a long list of comments, the (male) deputy commissioning editor for science programmes at Channel 4 was asked several extraordinary questions. He was particularly attracted to two women who were featured in the programmes (along with 20 or so men). One of the women was a Boeing engineering manager who often travelled to Russia. In his letter, the Channel 4 executive said: "Would like more background about her. Does she have kids? Might she have any concerns being away from them? Are they going through anything *(sic)* difficulties at this time?"

When the producer suggested to Channel 4 that this might be, well, a tad trivialising, an e-mail shot back from Sara Ramsden, Channel 4's commissioning editor for science, saying: "Are you so disinterested *(sic)* in humanity that you can't see at *(sic)* that might be of interest to viewers?... An animated, passionate, attractive women *(sic)* can help to bring people to the subject... (I'm not asking if she has multiple orgasms for God's sake)"

At the conference Ramsden herself described how she considered science ideas submitted to her and gave an example of a programme she knew she wanted for Channel 4 when she heard the title: *Cocaine Mummies*. "Cocaine!" Ramsden said, "Mummies!" in a tone that implied: what more could anyone want?

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

THIS SALAD IS GREAT, QUIN! I JUST LOVE THE DRESSING
IT'S ALL IN THE VINEGAR: IT'S FLAVOURSOME AND FULL-BODIED WITHOUT BEING TOO ACIDIC
AMAZING! IT MUST BE IMPORTED AND COST A BOMB
NOT AT ALL. I GOT IT AT THE LOCAL DELI...
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOT BALSAMIC!

DOING THE ROUNDS

CHIEF medical officer Liam Donaldson's consultation document Supporting doctors, protecting patients has had a mixed response.

Most doctors can't see the point of regular reappraisal organised by the department of health on top of the regular revalidation already planned by the General Medical Council. Even less clear is whether the government can deliver this particular strand of its "First Class NHS", having failed to make much inroad into waiting lists or treatment by postcode.

Under Donaldson's recommendations, allegedly dodgy doctors will no longer be suspended on full pay for the best part of a decade, but swiftly referred to an independent, impartial "Assessment and Support Centre" with "a non-medical chair" and "strong non-medical participation in the assessment process." The doctor could then be cleared, retrained, monitored, treated, or referred on to another official body (*sic*).

Like most "new" Labour initiatives, it makes for a good soundbite. But will it deliver?

For more than 10 years Dr William Pickering, a GP with wide experience of medico-legal work, has campaigned for an independent medical inspectorate by asking "who picks up doctors' mistakes?" Pickering has concentrated on the basic clinical errors any reasonably competent doctor could be expected to avoid. Much of these revolve around the unnecessarily late diagnosis of treatable disease and the improper supervision of ongoing medical treatment.

In his medico-legal work, Pickering has seen repeated examples of doctors of all ages and ranks failing to follow basic medical rules: failing to investigate blood in the urine resulting in death from undiagnosed bladder cancer; failure to put a patient with a heart attack or a stroke on medication to prevent a further attack. Examples such as these happen every day in the NHS, and even when they result in patient harm, they are rarely picked up or commented on. Even at the simplest levels there is no systematic way to identify and act of doctors' individual mistakes. So there is no guarantee Donaldson's assessment centres will manage it.

Pickering believes an independent medical inspectorate, headed by doctors with a presence in every region, would be a huge step forward. The "strong non-medical participation" of Donaldson's view is politically predictable, but only doctors have the easy access to patient records necessary to make an informed judgement and have much clearer idea of what is acceptable practice. The inspectors would not, however, be employed by the NHS.

Donaldson is likely to win the argument as he's chief medical officer, but he'd do well to read Pickering's proposal which has been submitted to the Bristol inquiry.

Meanwhile, the inquiry has heard allegations that surgeon James Wisheart continued to operate on children after 1 May 1995, despite the written statements of his colleagues, the trust management and an external review by independent experts that he had stopped on that date. How would Donaldson protect patients from a surgeon who carries on operating when everyone around him insists he isn't? I think we should be told.

● South West Ambulance Service Ltd wishes to stress it is a reputable private ambulance service and not "the operator in the Swansea area" that "has 34 criminal charges to his name" (*Eye* 986).

M.D.

"You can trust me, I'm not a doctor"

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on Prism Rail

THE mettle of John Prescott's transport policy will be tested in coming months when his fabulous new shadow strategic rail authority (SSRA) decides which companies deserve to have their franchises extended until 2010 or beyond.

One company that has already put in a bid is Prism Rail, notorious for its desire to replace the most unprofitable trains with buses (*Eye* 976). In just three years it has made great strides – cancelling masses of trains and erasing services from the timetables – but the company apparently wants more time to debilitate routes previously in reasonably good health.

Prism wants to extend its monopoly of local trains in the south west after its current franchises expire in 2004. West Country local authorities must be surprised by Prism's nerve: their generous marketing of local branch lines resulted in growing passenger numbers, to which Prism responded with economically damaging service cuts.

The infuriating negativity of Prism's Wales and West franchise is summed up by its response to a complaint from an *Eye* reader who found the left-luggage office at Penzance station closed for the August eclipse (he pulled a shoulder muscle carrying heavy luggage around the town). External affairs manager Sharon Wells explained: "During the week of the eclipse we were aware that we would not satisfy potential demand and decided, rightly or wrongly, to close the facility."

Commuters on the Severn Beach to Bristol line won't welcome a franchise extension either: some of the few services Prism hasn't converted to bus operation have been cancelled when Prism would rather use the rolling stock to convey fans to rugby matches in Cardiff. In that city there are more unhappy passengers, Prism's Cardiff Railway franchise being officially rated even worse than Virgin West Coast for train performance.

Cardiff (which pockets the third highest subsidy per mile in Britain) saw a fall in passenger miles travelled when most other franchises experienced growth despite indifferent service and high fares. Passengers and taxpayers might reasonably expect the franchise to be cut short, but under "new" Labour the opposite could happen.

Believing itself to be in a strong negotiating position, Prism has generously offered to improve train performance if its franchises are renegotiated. It may be overlooking some basic points, such as its obligation to perform far better than now under its *existing* franchise contracts. Or that SSRA head Sir Alastair Morton has said "investment, investment, investment" is the key to renegotiation: Prism has invested next to nothing in Wales and West and *reversed* previous investment in Cardiff by swapping decent trains for cheap rail-buses whose safety is under review.

Morton also promises that the worst-performing operators can expect an "exit pass" from the rail industry. Similarly Prescott has said franchises will be extended only for operators who work in the interests of the consumer. Logically that rules out Prism Rail from at least two of its franchises, but who says Prescott is logical? After all, he is fixing it for Railtrack to take over the largest chunk of the London Underground network long after it has established a track record of incompetence on the mainlines.

PS: Prism doesn't have to worry about extending its LTS Rail franchise, which runs until 2011. But it has renamed the misery line c2c, using the same PR sleight of hand that turned British Gas into Centrica and Yorkshire Water into Kelda.

Why c2c? Managers say it can mean one of a number of things, like coast 2 capital. Or could it mean charges 2 costly? Prism has been let off the hook over its promised replacement of old trains (*Eye* 985), so perhaps c2c stands for changes 2 commitments or contract 2 casual. The franchise has cost Prism £200,000 in fines over 12 months for not providing enough seats; regular passengers might think commuters 2 captive, carriages 2 crowded, condemned 2 claustrophobia or close 2 collapse more apt. Some might even get a subliminal message from the new branding: convert 2 car.

'Dr B. Ching'

Down on the Fish Farm

SHORTLY after announcing that the salmon killer disease infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) was present in Hydro Seafood GSP farm cages in Loch Nevis to the north of Fort William, it has emerged that Scottish office (SO) biologists probably already knew or had strong suspicions that the virus had "jumped" from farm fish to wild fish.

The Loch Nevis announcement was made on 8 May 1998. On 2 June staff from the government's Aberdeen marine laboratory examined eight sea trout caught at the mouth of the River Inverie, which flows into Loch Nevis. Initially the lab said it found no evidence of ISA. Seventeen months later, R.S. Raynard of the lab now admits that four fish did have ISA. He said: "This was not as clear as cases of ISA previously seen in farmed fish. However... This result is good evidence for four fish being positive for ISA."

Since the start of the outbreak, government biologists have maintained that the ISA virus would not infect wild fish and that it was confined to salmon in seawater. Freshwater fish were not at risk, they said. Now they admit that ISA has infected wild fish in a wide rage of Scottish rivers from the Tweed to the Isle of Skye. How much reliance should be placed on their assurance that ISA is not a human health risk?

Meanwhile, a farm to the east of Skye used to hold 40,000 brood-stock fish, salmon from which eggs were stripped to rear new generations of farm salmon. The storehouse that supplied food to that site is infested with rats. Local people fear the number of rats is reaching plague proportions and it is alleged that Rentokil is almost permanently on site.

A few weeks ago, because of "unseasonable hot summer weather", more than 30,000 of these 20lb weight fish died. A boat, called in to hoover up the corpses, snagged the cages and tore a gap, through which live fish escaped and an unspecified number of dead fish floated off in the current.

Local reports allege that nearby beaches were covered with a "scum-line of fat" which they say had been washed ashore from the corpses of decaying salmon. The rats were also feeding on this. Gas bubbles (fat globules) were noted on the surface close to where the dead fish are thought to have ended up.

Little seems to have been done to recover the escaped fish or the bodies of the dead fish for proper disposal. Instead the empty cages, eight in number, have been repaired and restocked with a new batch of 180,000 salmon smolts (immature fish).

Neither the Scottish Executive nor the Scottish environment pollution agencies has made a statement. The disease that killed the fish has not been identified – or, if it has, government fisheries biologists are not releasing details. As far as can be established, no restriction has been placed on either the site or the sale of farm fish that may have the same ancestry as salmon which could have been fed food fouled by rats.

'Old Trout'

Down on the Farm

SERIOUS fraud in the food industry is not only found in Italy – England can produce a scandal to be proud of too, it seems.

The storm troopers of the Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate (HMI) have launched a massive crackdown in the eastern counties, aided by police, Inland Revenue, trading standards and environmental health. In Bedfordshire, the area worst affected, MP Sir Nicholas Lyell QC has been following the inquiry via letters from the minister of agriculture.

The appalling scam is the sale of onions which – and this is the illegal bit – *do not comply with EC marketing standards*. These "outgrades" are usually sold as feed or dumped. But a few tonnes have been leaving packhouses by the back door, and have been sold on by "travellers" to shops and restaurants in "unmarked bags", thereby showing a "total disregard for EC grading requirements and labelling".

Rather than being commended for their enterprise, however, the villains are to be prosecuted. Or rather not prosecuted because none has been caught yet. An odd feature of this inquiry is an unwillingness by any wholesaler to assist, leading to the suspicion that, rather than being confined to a few "rogue" packhouses, this is a common practice to avoid the wasteful cost of dumping, and the real rogue is the one who has spilt the, er, beans.

'Gumboot'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

THIRST AND FOREMOST

INSPECTOR Knacker has swung into action in Durham over the curious land deal highlighted in *Eye* 985.

In September we revealed that the strapped-for-cash city council had agreed to sell three properties to a local businessman for £500,000 less than they were worth, in exchange for a small patch of land that is the key to the planned £25m "Millennium City" redevelopment scheme.

Knacker, investigating allegations of fraud, has now arrested and released on police bail city council chief executive Colin Shearsmith and businessman Rob Fulton. Fulton, who bought the properties in Claypath, happens to be the brother-in-law of Labour councillor Mildred Brown, a member of the new council cabinet and former chair of the finance committee.

Mrs Brown also figures in an intriguing, long hushed-up account of the sophisticated off-duty habits of Durham's senior Labour councillors that has found its way to the *Eye*. In a statement to the Labour group dated November 1996, Cllr Bill Kellett, the former group leader, wrote how he had been shocked when presented by the town clerk with an office drinks bill for more than £1,400: "As I rarely drink, and certainly never drink lager (over 400 units beer and 400 units lager consumed) I found this somewhat alarming as I was legally responsible for this account."

Kellett asked his deputy, Maurice Crathorne (see *Eye* 989), if he knew anything about it. Crathorne, according to Kellett, replied: "The mayor has not been taking the lads up to the Parlour for a drink, so we've been doing it for him." Kellett then ordered that his drinks cupboard be locked and drinks only supplied on his instruction. A few days later the lock on the cupboard was found to have been forced and yet more booze removed. His statement continued: "Unfortunately the only persons who had been in the offices were [Labour councillors] M Crathorne, J Bowman, D Payne and Mrs M Brown."

Kellett's anxieties over his drinks bill were resolved soon afterwards. He was replaced as council leader by, er, Maurice Crathorne MBE.

CLEAR BREACHES

WHEN asked by the district auditor why Clear Communication got the PR contract for Vale of Glamorgan council without the council asking for written quotations, chief executive David Foster claimed that he and Labour council leader Shaun Stringer had received "simultaneous approaches" from Clear about the company doing "communication work for the council". Spooky.

Proper procedures were not followed, reported the auditor, when within a month Clear presented its proposals to senior councillors and the council promptly awarded the £75,000 contract to Clear, rather than putting it out to tender.

The district auditor was not impressed by the procedures of the PR industry either, as he questioned why Clear was allowed to add a charge of 25 percent to its expenses paid by the council. For example, on 29 January 1998, J Underwood, S Simon and D Chapman, of Clear Communication had a meal with Labour leader Stringer at Benedictos restaurant in Cardiff. It was obviously convivial, as the bill came to £278.60, but Clear then billed the council another 25 percent, as an "on-cost" — or what non PR professionals might call a "rip-off".

The district auditor, concentrating on the maze of council rule-breaking, failed to ask the most interesting question. How did a PR consultancy from London, which has neither an office nor a phone number in Wales, come to approach both the chief executive and leader of Vale of Glamorgan council and persuade them to appoint them without formal tenders?

A clue can be found in the links between Clear man David Chapman, who enjoyed the Benedictos beano, and Labour councillors. Mr Chapman was a director of the now-defunct company Media City, set up with the council's backing in Cardiff in the early 1990s. Fellow directors included former Labour councillor Paddy Kitson.

KNIGHT HAWK

FORMER West Lancashire district councillor Arthur Adlen wrote a wounded letter to Labour's local government supremo at Millbank, Howard Knight, after the *Eye*'s story in issue 988 about attempts to fix Adlen a £26,000-a-year job as chief officer of the West Lancs council for voluntary service (CVS).

We reported that Knight had made his disapproval known after it became apparent that Adlen's fellow party members, councillors Jean White and John Fillis, who sat on the interview panel, clearly had no interest in appointing anyone for the job other than their chum. Knight replied to Adlen by return of post with a two-page bollocking pointing out "the failure of some members of West Lancs DC to comply with the statutory provision relating to the registration and declaration of interests, including compliance with the national code of local government conduct".

After failing to make an appointment three times, the CVS job has now been readvertised. Applicants other than Arthur Adlen may be cheered to know that this time Fillis and White are not on the selection panel. The CVS ad in the *Grauniad* carries a slogan which has caused some mirth in Lancashire: "Striving to be an equal opportunities employer".

CAPITA PUNISHMENT

ACTION 2000, set up to monitor the preparedness of essential services to cope with the millennium bug, has given local government a clean bill of health. Odd then that Lambeth council is in a state of chaos following the belated realisation that the housing benefit (HB) system, run by ubiquitous "service provider" Capita (*Eyes passim*), is not Y2K compliant.

Michael Crich, Lambeth's director of corporate resources, let the cat out of the bag at a meeting of the policy committee following an avalanche of complaints about Capita's performance. As a result of the latest cock-up, Lambeth's HB system is to shut down for a month while data is transferred to a new computer system.

Doing particularly well out of this latest fiasco are those staff set to receive fat pay cheques to help sort out the mess, not least as some of the work will be done over the Christmas and millennium holidays. Also benefiting are corrupt staff who have fiddled the system from the inside and who will doubtless use the transfer of the data as an opportunity to cover-up their wrongdoing.

No prizes though for guessing who the losers will be. Step forward the many residents of "New Lambeth", who even before this latest glitch faced eviction for rent arrears due to Capita's inability to process HB claims within statutory time-limits.

● **BERKSHIRE Tories patriotically rallied to William Hague's call for a boycott on all French goods. The true-blue councils of Wokingham and Bracknell Forest immediately banned French beef from school meals. This two-fingers to Johnny Foreigner was particularly courageous as Berkshire's mad cow conscious schools meals provider, Initial Catering, had long ago removed beef from *any* source from its menus.**

Meanwhile opposition Tory councillors on Windsor and Maidenhead council have issued a handsome leaflet seeking local people's views on local government reform. The printers who did such a good job? Imprimerie Atlantique of Moutiers-les-Mauxfaits, er, France.

Pseuds Corner

To: Hackney Schools' Headteachers and Governors

I am writing to introduce formally the new management arrangements within Hackney LEA for the School Improvement. I am aware that you are keen to know how the service is managed following contractual transfer to Nord Anglia.

This is an innovative and exciting opportunity, which includes building on the strong basis of expectation generated by schools anchored in partnership processes articulated over relevant time.

TERRY CONNOLLY
Contracts Manager Nord Anglia PLC

This controversial book *[The Alphabet Versus The Goddess]* argues that the act of reading an alphabet reinforces masculine ideas at the expense of feminine, holistic and visual ones.

The Softback Preview

It has struck me of late, and not just because she's been called the princess of pop-soul, that there are elements of Diana, Princess of Wales, in Whitney Houston. Beautiful and bland, in the early days, she was daffily finger-popping, just wanting to "Dance With Somebody", yet sentimental (she was 'Saving All her Love' for someone, a married man, as it turned out).

Like Diana, both time and an errant husband have mellowed her and the new album, *My Love Is Your Love*, is a soundtrack of, for the most part, stoic resignation.

GLYN BROWN
Independent

Minutes before going on stage, Cher always says a prayer with her crew who all hold hands. What does she pray for? 'God help me to go out there and do a fabulous show.' And then she says 'Lala kiki' to everyone else. 'It means love and kisses in some language or other.'

Telegraph Magazine

Life is a string of pearls, of individual moments. To make it a beautiful string you have to get the most out of each and every moment. Many people cut corners. Too much fast food, too many empty calories – in meals, TV-shows etc. Far too many tedious routines. It is not for them we make our toilet seats. In our field – the bathroom – we want to contribute to transforming the trivialities into small rituals of joy and pleasure.

Follow us. Take your life seriously. Make the routines rituals.

Pressalit Sales Literature

LLEWELLYN JONES – On September 1st 1999 to Hephzibah and Antonio Coppola, an enchanting daughter Athena Enaid Nikolai Eva Llewellyn, a sister for Olympia Lumière.

Times

We, the people of DuPont,

dedicate ourselves daily to the work of improving life on our planet.

We have the curiosity to go farther... the imagination to think bigger... the determination to try harder... and the conscience to care more.

Our solutions will be bold. We will answer the fundamental needs of the people we live with to ensure harmony, health and prosperity in the world.

Our success will be ensured. We will be demanding of ourselves and work relentlessly to complete our tasks. Our achievements will create superior profit for our shareholders and ourselves.

Our principles are sacred. We will respect nature and living things, work safely, be gracious to one another and our partners, and each day we will leave for home with consciences clear and spirits soaring.

Du Pont (Chemicals) Mission Statement

CONTRIBUTORS: Eileen Mullen, Peter Burke, Francis Harvey, Francis Harvey, Andrew Reading, M.W. Fann, Anon.

£10 paid for entries

"...and in a moment Julie will come round selling life-jackets"

AVIATION NEWS

IF suicide emerges as the cause of the EgyptAir disaster, the next-of-kin must hope they have a smoother ride than those relations of the 104 victims of a Boeing 737 that crashed in December 1997.

The plane, operated by SilkAir, a wholly owned subsidiary of Singapore International Airlines (SIA), was flying from Jakarta to Singapore when it veered violently to the right and plunged 34,000 feet, near vertically and at full power, into a river delta near Palembang.

At first investigators suspected another rudder "hardover" incident; and when divers recovered the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) and flight data recorder, so-called black boxes, from the river, a quick, conclusive investigation looked likely. But analysis revealed that both had stopped recording minutes before the crash. Nor had they failed due to mechanical or electrical problems. They had been deliberately turned off.

Suspicion centred on the pilots. First officer Duncan Ward, a 23-year-old New Zealander, was popular and admired for his flying skills. According to friends, he loved his job and had not a care in the world. The captain, 41-year-old father of three Tsu Way Ming, was a Singaporean hero. A former fighter pilot with the Singapore air force, he had led its aerobatics team in the flypast marking the island's 25th anniversary before joining SilkAir where, in 1996, he had been promoted to training captain.

As investigators probed, a very different picture emerged, however. Tsu was millions in debt thanks to gambling and stock exchange losses. He had negative equity in his house due to the Far East slump, and loan sharks were persuing him. A life insurance policy for S$5m had come into effect the day before his death.

Professionally his career was in tatters. Due to complaints of cavalier flying and erasing CVRs – mainly New Zealand co-pilots – he had been disciplined and demoted from training captain. Despite this he was allowed to fly as a captain, with no check on his psychological condition.

All this was known to the investigators, the Singapore government and SIA (54 percent-owned by the government) well over a year ago. But they kept quiet and nothing appeared in the *Straits Times* (also 54 percent-owned by the government). When pressure from next of kin forced a statement last August, SIA admitted the aircraft "might have been brought down deliberately by human action".

It stopped short of confirming which pilot, despite overwhelming evidence against Tsu. Instead rumours spread through SIA that Duncan Ward had AIDS – suggesting a reason for suicide while trashing his reputation in a country where homosexuality is not tolerated.

The rumour disgusted friends and colleagues. Former SilkAir captain Mohan Raganathan has publicly stated that he left the company because of safety concerns and cites Tsu's "abuse of aircraft". SIA dismisses the allegations as "second-hand information, hearsay and rumour".

At first SIA offered S$25,000 compensation to families of victims of the 737 crash, later raised to S$200,000. Those who feel this is not enough to compensated for the loss of a breadwinner are invited to pursue the matter in the courts (100 percent-owned). But the statute of limitation means writs must be filed by 19 December. They would probably be heard next spring – but it's doubtful the crash report will be published before then.

Letters

Private Eye

Wong bloke

Sir,

Jonathan Fenby's reinvention of himself as a hero of press freedom is astonishing. Can this be the same Jonathan Fenby who, in April 1997, told a BBC interviewer: "What if a newspaper decides to devote less space to reporting critics of Beijing? Is it not the right of a newspaper to determine its own political line?"

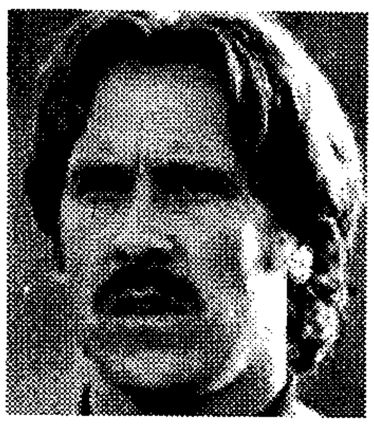
He likes to quote Martin Lee in his defence. Is this the same Martin Lee who recently told an international newswire that the only thing he can bring himself to read in the South China Morning Post is the bridge column?

Is this the same newspaper that installed a "kill" button in its internet chat room designed specifically to log off critics of Beijing while allowing critics of Britain full rein?

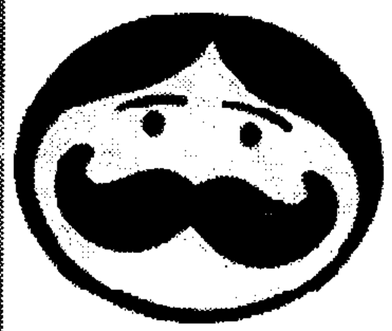
It can't be the same man. The only explanation I can think of is that Jonathan Fenby, like Chan, Wong and Zhang, is now a popular Chinese name.

Yours in amazement,
NURY VITTACHI,
Hong Kong, China.

Lookalike



Mr Pringle



Seaman

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the remarkable similarity between England goal keeper David Seaman, and Mr Pringle, the popular cocktail snack character? Is their facial hair by any chance related?

Yours,
D. Coleman.
Wembley.

Casualty list

Sir,

In Hunters' cartoon on page 8 (989), it must have been a good week for road deaths. On average just under 11 people a day are killed and 120 seriously injured on the roads in Britain (Road Accidents in Great Britain). A third are pedestrians or cyclists. Instead of 35 for that week, 75 would have been more accurate.

Yours,
DR PETER WARD,
Via e-mail.

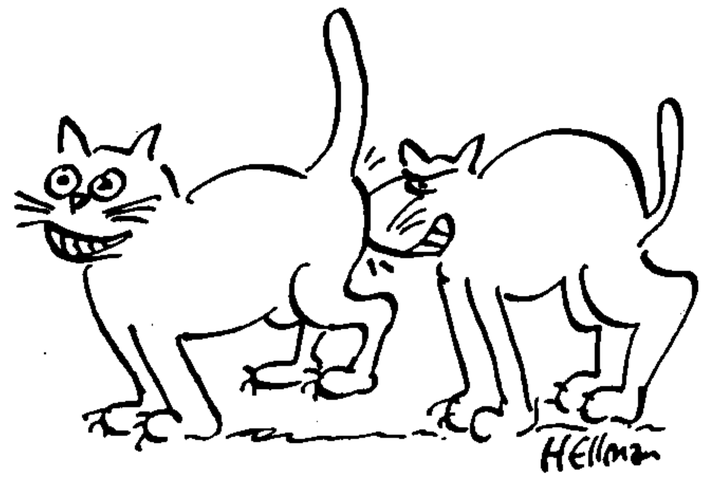
Victor victorious

Sir,

Thrilled to appear in the Eye, even if anonymously, and thrilled too to know that Victor Gollancz is still considered respectable (Literary Review, 989). But I see no reason why the author in question should remain anonymous. He's called Alan Mahar, and his truly excellent novel is called Flight Patterns. Now, six months after publication, he's had not one national review but three. Progress of a sort, I suppose... Actually, to be fair to the literary editor of the Excess on Sunday, a review in that paper was unlikely. It was just her bad luck that she happened to be sitting at the next table.

Yours faithfully,
MIKE PETTY,
Publishing Director, Victor Gollancz.

GREY ARIAS



"R Sole Mio"

Catty remarks

Sir,

"Dancing with Cats" (Pseuds Corner, Eye 989) is a satirical work which follows on from "Why Cats Paint", published a few Xmases ago. Your contributor has made an easy £10 (or didn't get it).

Yours faithfully,
S. JACKSON,
Edinburgh.

What A Pathetic Way To Make A Living

Sir,

We act for Biro Bic Limited who are the owners of the Trade Mark "Biro" in the United Kingdom and some sixty other countries.

Our client's attention has been drawn to an article entitled "The Gnome World English Dictionary" in your issue for 3 September 1999 in which the word "biro" is used as a general term for a ballpen. Our clients have been advised that they must be alert to draw attention to any possible infringement or misuse of the word "Biro" and to request correction where appropriate, in order to preserve the value of their Mark.

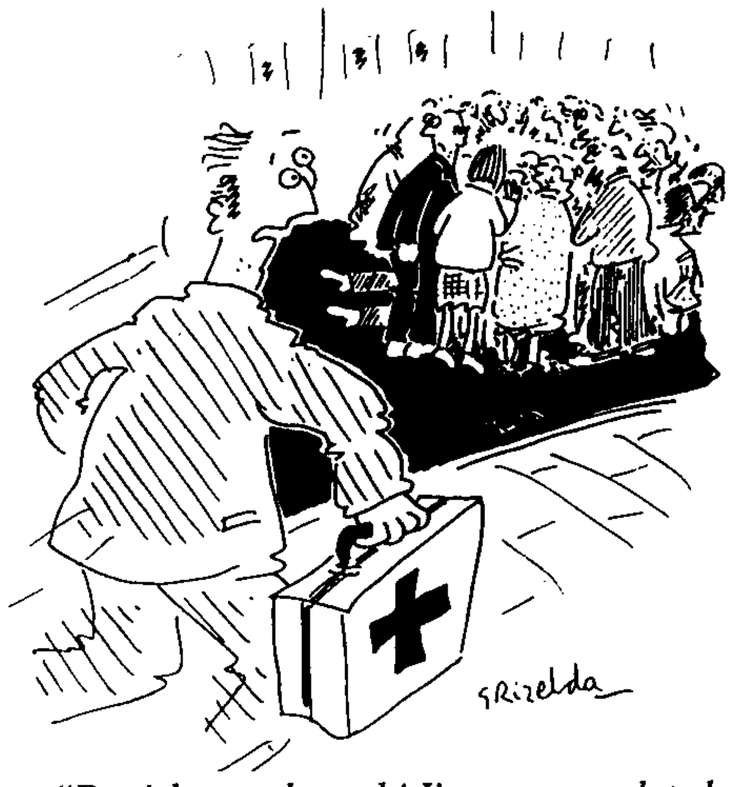
Accordingly, we draw your attention to the matter on behalf of our clients... [The rest of this letter has been cut on the grounds that it is far too boring to reproduce in full. Ed.]

Yours faithfully,
PETTMAN SMITH SOLICITORS,
London SW1.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

GOSH, THIS UNDERCOVER TV DOCUMENTARY HAS MADE US LOOK REALLY BAD!
AGENCY
...ONE OF OUR CHAPERONES HAS BEEN HAVING SEX WITH OUR YOUNG GIRLS... IT'S HORRIBLE!!! IT'S BROUGHT SHAME ON THE FASHION INDUSTRY!!!
...IT'S BLATANT HETEROSEXUALITY!!!
GOSH!
DISGUSTING!



"Don't let me through! I'm an unregulated private ambulance driver"

Blue for danger

Sir,

The current ambulance debate began when M.D. brought the case involving the death of my niece, Kathryn Jones, to the attention of Eye readers. As a family we would like to refocus attention on what, for us, is the heart of the issue.

Kathryn was killed when her vehicle was in collision with a private ambulance.

The ambulance was travelling at speed in a built up area with blue light flashing and siren sounding.

The driver lost control of the ambulance which careered across the road and collided with Kathryn. He was subsequently convicted of careless driving.

The driver had not received any special driving instruction to drive emergency vehicles.

There is no legal requirement for drivers of emergency vehicles to have any special driving instruction.

These are the facts and I have chosen every word with care.

We hold the work that hospitals and ambulance services do in high regard. After all Kathryn was a nurse, as is her twin sister. However, we maintain that it should be compulsory for every driver of an emergency vehicle to be specially, and adequately, trained in order to be able to cope with the uniquely challenging demands of emergency driving before he/she is permitted to take the wheel on a blue light run.

The urgency of this issue lies in the fact that private ambulances are increasingly contracted by certain NHS Trusts to perform duties involving emergency runs. Indeed it was under such a contract with The United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust that the ambulance which killed Kathryn was operating. At the time of the accident it was engaged on an emergency "retrieval".

The "retrieval" system is becoming established nationally. Private ambulances are used to deliver it and the circumstances of Kathryn's accident reveal that not all drivers involved are trained in the skills required for high speed emergency driving. She was the first victim of this new system. We do not want others.

There is a desperate need for government inspection and regulation in the private ambulance sector and we believe any review should begin with driving standards. The legal loophole which allows emergency driving without special training should be closed. This seems to us just plain common sense and, in the interests of road safety, the problem should be addressed promptly or more lives are going to be lost.

Yours sincerely,
KEN WILLIAMS,
Okehampton, Devon.

Students, huh!

Sir,

Re: Eye 989 Pseuds Corner: the Meta Society. Could this society by any chance be what in undergraduate days we used to call a "joke"? I had thought the concept was not unknown to you.

Yours earnestly,
TIM PARKER,
Reading, Berks.

Adjectival disagreement

Sir,

No wonder our friends across the English Channel, which they insist on calling La Manche for some obscure reason, refuse to eat good British (mainly Scottish, of course) beef.

Apparently, if Mike Barfield improved his French, our beef exports might just be accepted, even welcomed.

Sorry to be such a pedant, but Mike's cartoon headed Boucherie Nouveau ought to have been Boucherie Nouvelle, since the noun is a so-called "feminine" substantive, requiring an adjectival agreement – nouvelle, not nouveau.

Just thought I'd mention it...

IAIN McDOUGALL,
Coatbridge.

Lookalike

Yoda

Fayed

Sir,

I have recently noticed the similarity between the alien Yoda from Star Wars and the alien owner of Harrods and proprietor of Punch. Which one has the best chance of British citizenship?

Yours,
PETER BRADLEY,
Kettering, Northants.

Spanish practices

Sir,

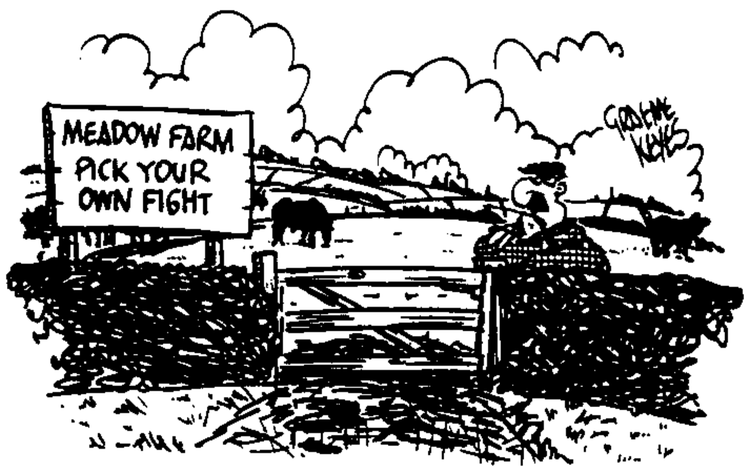
The letter from "Eurovet" (EYE 989) makes two clear statements about the writer.

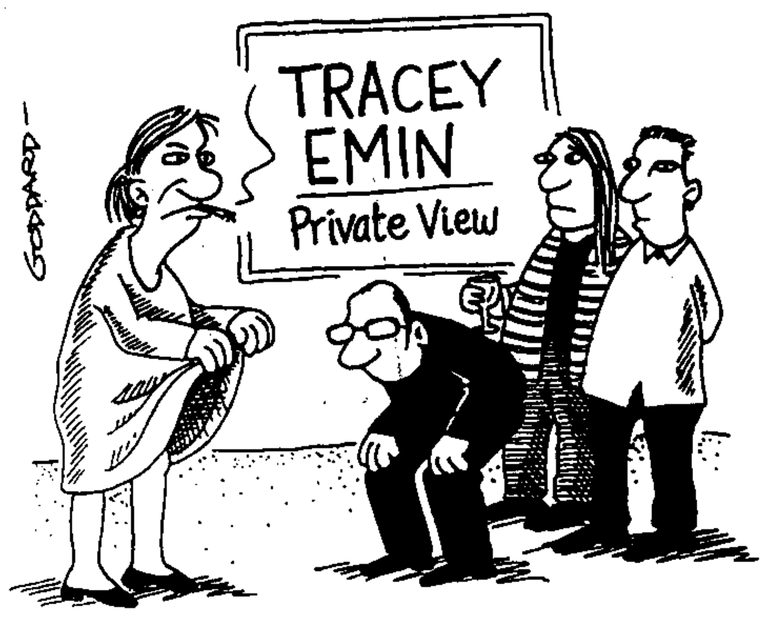
One, he has obviously never had the unpleasant experience of working with one of our pointless Spanish colleagues, and two, he must be mind-numbingly gullible to believe that all Spanish abattoirs operate to UK standards. Working, as I do, for the MHS, I suffer the mis-fortune of having to work under the "supervision" of Spanish vets, most of whom are under 30 years old, straight out of university, struggle to speak English and most frightening of all, have NO experience of working in the meat production industry. According to current legislation, we MHIs may assist the OVS by carrying out "practical tasks" and the vet is in charge. This system fails when the vet doesn't have a clue!

As for the "cosy relationship" with local authorities prior to the MHSS (sorry, MHS) who the hell does he think runs the MHS... all the old local authority staff who transferred to the MHS gravy train in 1995. Many of us working at the sharp end of meat inspection feel that the MHS is causing more damage to the British meat industry than the French beef ban.

Yours faithfully,
NAME & ADDRESS WITHHELD.

Via e-mail.





Fish and foul

Sir,

Re: Missing Link, Eye 989. You have fallen foul of the salmon farming industry, by permitting "Old Trout" to refute in print the findings of qualified marine biologists, in his exposure of the part industry pollution plays in Scottish shellfish toxicity.

K.G. McCallum (Any relation of the Kirsty G. McCallum who works for Ardvar Salmon?) writes (Eye 989) that there is no scientific evidence whatever linking amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP) to salmon farming, and that shellfish poisoning during summer months is documented over many centuries.

It certainly is, in the case of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) in Scotland. The first, thirty cases and two dead from eating mussels out of Leith docks in 1827, the second, three cases, all lived after eating mussels out of Grangemouth docks in 1958. The authors of the subsequent report in The Lancet, of August 1960, observed that in all nine previous European outbreaks and the latest reported, the incriminated mussels were invariably taken from waterways which were essentially enclosed, stagnant or polluted.

The only published report of shellfish poisoning from Scottish west coast shellfish is found in the July 1998 Lancet, which reports the first Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP) outbreak associated with mussels harvested in the UK. In June 1997, 49 patients presented with acute (within 30 min) onset of nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and feeling feverish lasting for more than 8hrs. All had eaten UK mussels in two London restaurants. Mussel samples taken from the restaurants tested positive for DSP toxins. The Western Isles EHO subsequently submitted a report to the procurator fiscal, alleging that the mussels, gathered from salmon cages in Loch Seaforth in the Western Isles, were illegally marketed from an untested source. No prosecution has resulted.

K.G. McCallum asks us to note that there is no marine fish farming on the east coast. Curiously enough, a current application is before the Court of Session in Edinburgh, for a legal review of the SEPA decision allowing the production from a salmon farm in the Moray firth (east coast) to rise to 1375 tonnes per annum.

"Qualified marine biologists" may support government and industry assertions that pollution from salmon farms plays no part in the present epidemic of biotoxin production, nevertheless they will have to produce more than adage and old wives tales to prove their case.

"Old Trout" and your esteemed organ must be congratulated for refuting qualified marine biologists and exposing the damage caused to wild sea trout and salmon stocks by intensive salmon farming in past issues.

ALLAN W. BERRY,
Cannich by Beauly, Inverness-shire.

Sir,

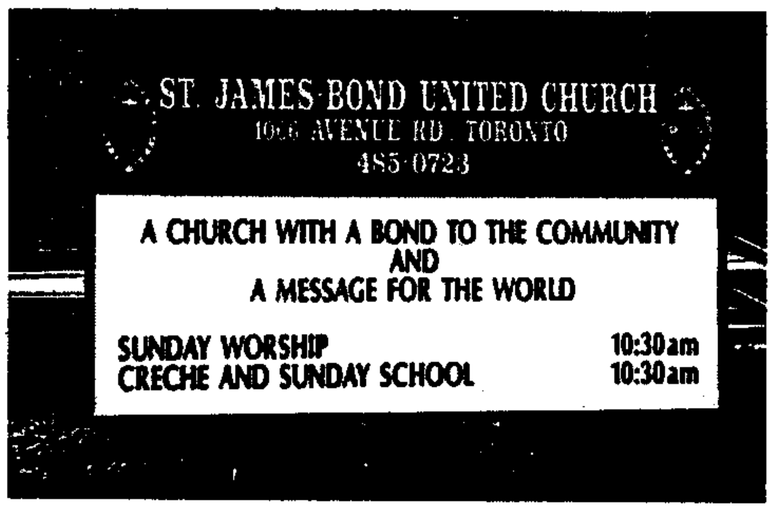
Re: Down on the Fish Farm by "Old Trout" and the defence of salmon farming by K.G. McCallum in the issue of 12 November 1999.

You may be interested in knowing that today the Scottish Executive announced, for the first time in history this late in the year, an extension of the ban on all shellfish harvesting on the west coast of Scotland.

Could you ask Mr McCallum if there is an "R" in September, October and November?

Yours faithfully,
MR J. HERIOT,
Paisley.

I-SPY *Toronto*


ST. JAMES-BOND UNITED CHURCH
A CHURCH WITH A BOND TO THE COMMUNITY
AND
A MESSAGE FOR THE WORLD
SUNDAY WORSHIP 10:30am
CRECHE AND SUNDAY SCHOOL 10:30am

Submitted by Sara Scharf. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Thribb-tickling

Sir,

So farewell then/Colemanballs (Eye 988)/You mocked Kevin Keegan/For saying/"One eye on the pot/and another/up the chimney"/But Brian's mum says/it comes from an old/music-hall song about/a one-eyed cook/She remembers/Her dad singing it/In the 1920s/So the joke's on you.

DERMOD QUIRKE (56¼)&
BRIAN HOLSER (60½)

Halifax.

http://www.shylock.com/1lbflesh/

The E-Merchant of Venice

Beefing over pigs

Sir,

The Veterinary Public Health Association may well be right about the quality of Spanish abattoirs. Doubtless they have been built with the same EU grants (and we all know where they come from) as the colossal new Spanish pig farms that are swamping the European market and so ruining UK farmers.

Never mind that the pig housing systems are illegal here – too cruel – or that their feed and use of drugs is illegal here – too risky to human health – Towny Blair is so keen to be at "the heart of Europe" (a royal box at the Palio) that he has no more intention of keeping out dodgy Euro pig meat than he has of replacing the Lords with a democratic chamber.

NEIL DATSON

Via e-mail.

Negative vetting

Sir,

"The Vet Gumboot uses" probably only has the privileges of treating his pet hamster. Real farmers have the choice of using us or not. However, most appreciate that we provide a valuable service. Who else will attend at 3am to calve a cow or be on duty over Christmas and the new year? As to being greedy, who else will still visit even after not receiving a cheque for nine months?

The misuse of antibiotics is due more to insufficient veterinary control and the advent of supplies brought in from abroad, and supplied to farmers illegally.

Having been in the Veterinary Public Health visit to Spain, I can only agree with Eurovet's comments about Spanish abattoirs and vets. Before 1993 and the introduction of vets into abattoirs in this country, standards of hygiene and welfare at many were from another millennium, never mind another century.

Yours professionally,
BRITVET,

Via e-mail.

Van Winkle-picker

Sir,

Spoof indeed (Rye Comment, Eye 989)! Mr Van Winkle should wake up to the realities of life down on the South Coast.

Such was the success of Mr Milligan's advert in our local paper that the following week after a further insert which read "Fetch", I observed a large bloodhound ambling down the Milligan lane with said rural organ in its mouth.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN PODMORE,

Rye, E. Sussex.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The best thing for them to do [Ireland] is to stay at nil-nil until they score the goal."
MARTIN O'NEILL
(K.M. Aldridge)

"Paul Scholes – the most complete mental player I've ever seen."
BEN THORNLEY, Radio 5
(Gordon Jones)

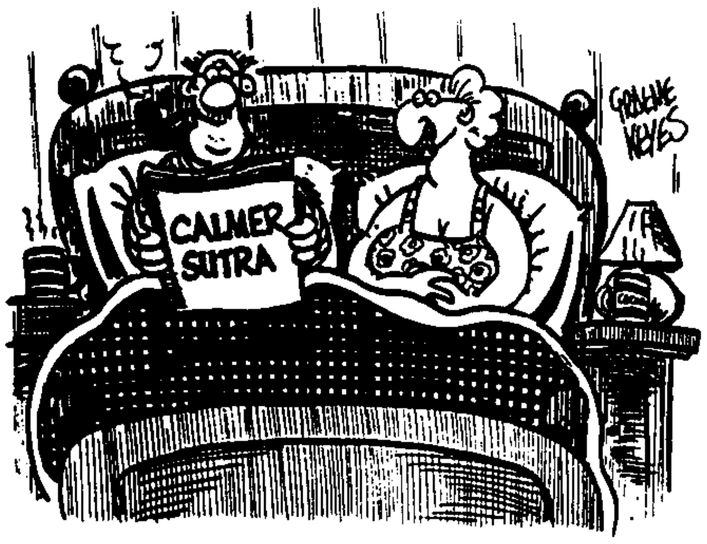
"...the ball went over mine and Colin Calderwood's heads and who should be there at the far post but yours truly – Alan Shearer."
COLIN HENDRY, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Evans)

"Mick McCarthy will have to replace Cascarino because he's quickly running out of legs."
MARK LAWRENSON, BBC2
(Tony Kinsella)

"Some people ran the gauntlet of gay rights protesters, but Portillo went in the back way."
SIMON HARRIS, ITV
(Anon.)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Durban**
from Our Own Correspondent

SO, your Queen Brenda got home safely without being mugged! Funnily enough, many of those most nostalgic for the "good old days" here are Brenda's own subjects back home – including the *Daily Mail* and her own mother. The Queen Mum, according to the posthumous memoirs of Lord Wyatt of Weeford, confessed to enormous admiration for apartheid's unapologetic P.W. Botha.

Then only days before Brenda's recent visit, the *Daily Mail* painted a warning, apocalyptic picture. "Beggars and goats have set up home in the marble foyers of derelict banks. South Africa today has become a nation on the edge of self-destruction," it frothed. "Parks and beaches have become killing fields."

Overcome by its own hysterical guff (concluding that whites were about to be "driven into the sea"), the paper promptly sent back its *romancier-en-chef*, Ross Benson, in case Her Maj was hacked to death by the blood-crazed followers of Nelson Mandela.

Actually the main danger she faced – apart from the deathly tedium of CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) – was from her own family. With exquisite timing, her former daughter-in-law was on a jolly to Cape Town. As Brenda flew in she was greeted with headlines in the local press (prop: Tony O'Reilly, c/o Baked Beans), explaining that when a saintly Irish magnate (T. O'Reilly) had backed La Fergiana in her darkest hour, he received threatening letters from Buckingham Palace. Fergie's PR swiftly explained: we dim colonials had failed to spot a joke.

The main worry for conference organizers and the palace, though, was Brenda's husband. If anything could provoke the Armageddon prophesied by the *Mail*, it would one be of Philip's famous racial "jokes", like the recent one about Indians. Durban, after all, has our largest Indian population.

The solution? Pack him off to the dullest imaginable functions: i.e. Boer War centenary commemorations. The nearest thing to an "incident" was at such a Bore-athon: a cannon backfired when lit by Winston Churchill's granddaughter, Celia Sandys, singeing her face.

The only spat to enliven the conference itself was "Uncle" Bob Mugabe's tantrum over "gangster gays" in the British cabinet. Otherwise CHOGM leaders followed hallowed tradition by backing down, at the last minute, from proposed sanctions against human rights abuses by member states.

If they had carried out this threat, the cosy club (Brenda called it, in her opening address, "our own World Wide Web") would be decimated. Amnesty International identified 17 of the fifty-four members as flouting Commonwealth guidelines.

Still, there's one head of government, in particular, that Brenda should treat with kid gloves (if she still wears 'em): said to be a complete control freak, pays lip service to democracy, but bends the rules as soon as it suits him... even done away with the code of "one man, one vote" to fix elections he's not sure of winning. Rules like an autocrat (not to say, frankly, a dictator). Yes, she should watch out for your Tony Blair.

The most symbolic moment of the conference was when Her Maj visited the Durban Exhibition Centre. Rural Zulu craftswomen, who had travelled far, were to present their wares. But as Brenda approached, the *meejah* swarmed forward, pushing aside the Zulu matrons and trampling over their precious goods.

In all, another conference of missed opportunities. "Uncle" Bob Mugabe and Prince Philip were unable to share views on "shirt lifters". And the doomsday *Daily Mail* prophesies about the "new" S'eth Efrica were buggered.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● "Our investigation into the death of Officer Diaz is not yet completed, and I am not going to rule out foul play," admitted a spokesman for Tapachula prison, Mexico, after the discovery of the body of prison warden Raul Zarate Diaz.

"It seems that, for reasons we cannot yet officially confirm, Officer Diaz climbed onto the roof of the building where married prisoners have their conjugal visits, and shortly afterwards fell to his death through the skylight. One of the couples, who were engaged in sexual intercourse at the time, told us that they heard the crash of glass and a scream, then saw Officer Diaz plummeting to his death on the stone floor. A video camera, a pair of smashed binoculars and a chorizo sausage were found hanging round his neck, and his trousers and shorts were around his knees. A number of pornographic magazines and sex toys were subsequently found on the roof, and a search of his apartment led to the discovery of a stash of videos, all apparently shot from the roof of the same building. But, as I say, I am still to be convinced that the officer has been involved in iniquity." *(La Cronica, 9/11/99. Spotter: Nick Spalding)*

—●—

● "You may call us criminals, but we regard ourselves as role models for the disabled," declared Munther Badir to a court in Jerusalem. "My brothers and I simply wanted to prove that we are special, and that the blind can be just as talented and resourceful as the sighted."

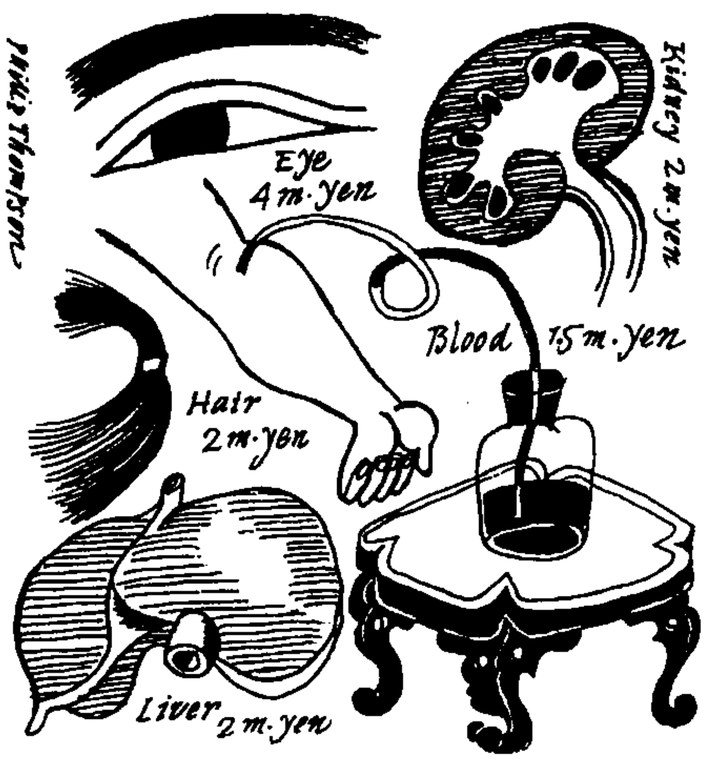
The three blind Arab brothers (Munther Badir, Muzhir Badir, and another who was too young to be identified) were in court, accused of tapping into Israeli army telephone lines so that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza could make free overseas calls, at the expense of the Israeli military. "The blind have special skills that the sighted do not possess," continued Munther, "and it was easy for us to hack into the Israeli army switchboard, using our Braille keyboards. Once we were in, we listened to the different clicks and tones, and made connections by imitating them. I am proud to say that we earned up to US $1,000 a day by charging for the calls. And what did it cost the Israeli army, except a little electricity?

"We also used our Braille keyboards to hack into the Israeli TV shopping channel, and obtain free television sets, which we sold of course, because television sets are not much use to us. You may call this theft, but we call it enterprise, and a victory for all disabled people, who are constantly being victimised by society."

The three brothers each received custodial sentences. *(The Sentinel [Uganda], 4/11/99. Spotter: Jason Loader)*

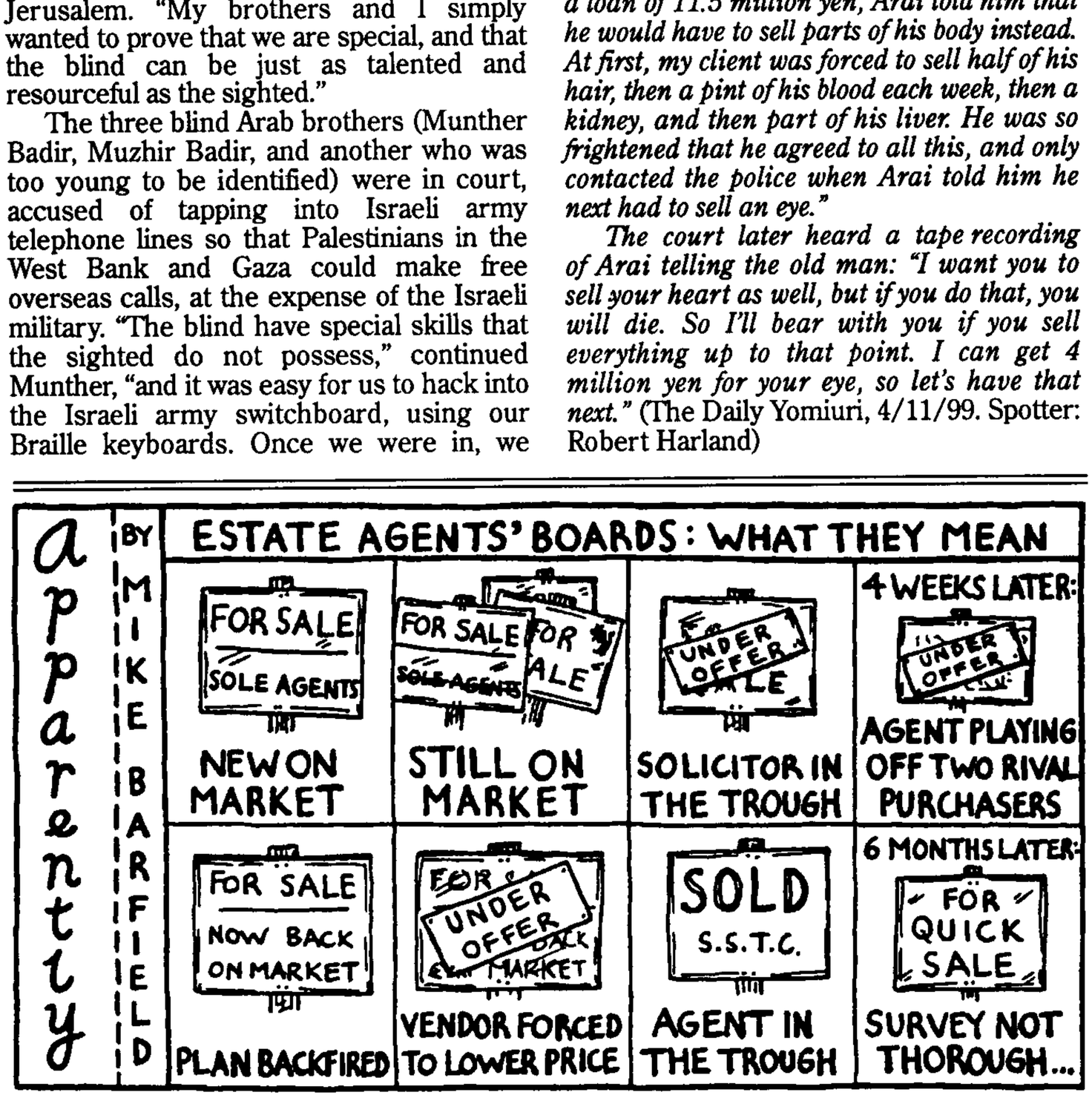
—●—

● *"In all my years as a barrister, I cannot recall ever hearing of such a despicable crime as this," declared the prosecuting counsel to a court in Tokyo. "The facts are simple and horrifying. The accused, Eisuke Arai, is a money-lender, and will stop at nothing to get his money back. When my client, who is a frail old man of seventy-three, was unable to repay*



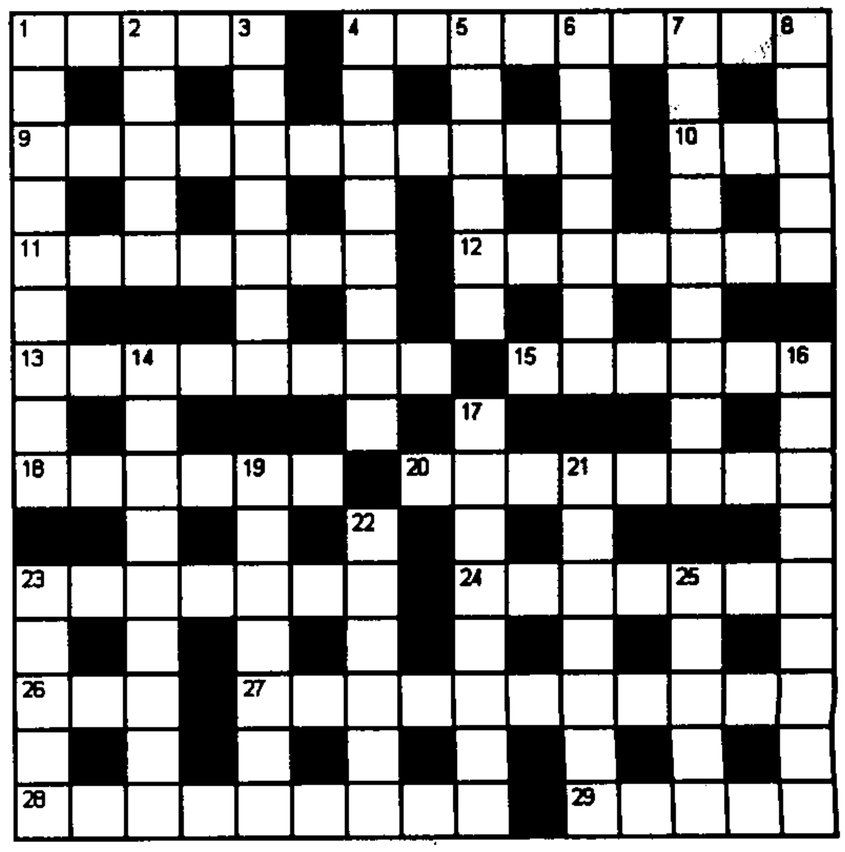
a loan of 11.5 million yen, Arai told him that he would have to sell parts of his body instead. At first, my client was forced to sell half of his hair, then a pint of his blood each week, then a kidney, and then part of his liver. He was so frightened that he agreed to all this, and only contacted the police when Arai told him he next had to sell an eye."

The court later heard a tape recording of Arai telling the old man: "I want you to sell your heart as well, but if you do that, you will die. So I'll bear with you if you sell everything up to that point. I can get 4 million yen for your eye, so let's have that next." (The Daily Yomiuri, 4/11/99. Spotter: Robert Harland)



EYE CROSSWORD 145

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Film of accident-prone bangers (5)
4 Labour bound to accept Straw originated workplace exploitation (9)
9/20/23dn. At a basic creative level, customised whips constitute a growing concern (11,8,5)
10 Kelvin's gone off member – 'rich la-di-da type' (3)
11 Comparatively dodgy – "right one to take the piste": Brenda (7)
12 R.E.M boys disbanded; they're very immature (7)
13 'Endless Journey' enclosure is a perversion (8)
15 Country music's number one: *Old boyfriend and I get firm* (6)
18 The French still without a side (6)
20 (see 9)
23 Foreign house's foreign cat piss? (7)
24 Frisky Cyclops about to be ousted by a nymph (7)
26 Backing party line internally – must be past it! (3)
27 (see 1 dn.)
28 Sense the acute pain behind the Mensa member? (5-4)
29 City: a dark confusion (5)

DOWN

1/27 'A fag getting publicity, it only encourages more puffs' – ... (9,11)
2 ... key *Sun* outburst about Tatchell's initial relations (5)
3 Passionate spiel resorted to by Tony and Bill at critical moments? (3,4)
4 Terrible curse — one gutless Tory's refuge (8)
5 Girl who makes *Eye* list, reportedly (6)
6 Columnist has aerated Tony on buzzer (7)
7 What a topping monarch! (5,4)
8 Bush requires local directions (5)
14 Monarch disposed of SNP leader plus leaders of representative assembly (9)
16 Awful gold decor – decrepit, rum sort (3,6)
17 Fraud (wow!) of French euro high-flier (8)
19 Dick inadequacy? Place an ad here in our mag. (3,4)
21 Dicky has flatulence, an untoward occurrence (3,4)
22 This is Archer's case – shudder! (6)
23 (see 9)
25 Right to choose outside member (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 3.12.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 144

Winner: DAVID WEBB

ACROSS: 1 Bob-sled 5 Belfast 9 Syria 10 Brown-nose 11/26 Millennium Wheel 12 Pier 14 Tory MPs 15 Shotgun 16 Linkman 19 Raleigh 21 Pleb 22 Privy purse 25 On the rack 26 (see 11) 27 Olympia 28 Serbian.

DOWN: 1 Bosom 2 Burglar 3 Leaked memo 4 Debunks 5 Blow-ups 6 (see 14 dn.) 7 Adoring 8 The French 13 World power 14/6 Telephoto Lens 17 No entry 18 Nirvana 19 Revokes 20 Israeli 23 Ellen 24 Weep.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

From the Editor

OUR warmest congratulations to Tony and Cherie who have been blessed with joyous news. It's a baby for the Millennium and I know that you will join with me in suggesting to Tony that we replace the traditional, old-fashioned Christmas service with a new "Blairmas" service to celebrate these new glad tidings! REJOICE!!

Hullo!

I know we don't hear much these days about the word "excommunication". But that doesn't mean to say that it has no place in a modern church. Because it does.

It's not just something we read about in boring old history books. It's something that's very relevant in the world of today.

Because what it's really about is loyalty. As Our Lord himself said, "He who is not for me, is a bastard" (*Gospel according to St John the Major, 3.7*).

When you sign on to become a member of the Church, you sign on to the whole package. You can't have people picking and choosing which bits they want to believe in, and which they don't. Goodness me! Where do you think the Church would be, if it allowed people just to believe whatever suits them at any given time?

What sort of Vicar would I be, if I said one thing one Sunday and then did a complete u-turn the next?

Our friend at the Tesco check-out counter wouldn't let me get away with that, would he? If, for example, I preached a sermon saying that foxhunting was immoral and should be banned as soon as possible, and then the next day said that perhaps it wasn't so bad after all!

Or if, as another example, I was to say that no one should ever be allowed to build houses on the field behind the vicarage, and then promptly sold the field to some developers, just because they'd given money to parish funds!

Well, you can imagine what a field day my critics would have if I behaved like that!

Which all brings me to the nub of what I want to say this week. As you all know, Mr Livingstone has recently been saying a lot of very silly things. Firstly, he has said that he can't accept some of the articles of faith, as laid down in the Book of Common Blair (1997 version).

Secondly, he has been going around questioning my judgement as vicar. And that, not to beat about the bush, is what amounts to another old-fashioned word, "heresy".

Now don't get me wrong. I don't want to see Mr Livingstone burned at the stake, or anything like that (although there are times, I must admit, when I wouldn't mind!), but, frankly, the Church can't afford to have Mr Livingstone as a full member, if he won't toe the line and accept everything that is laid down in the Nice One Creed.

We all remember how it goes: "I believe in three ways..." etc.

But that's not good enough for Mr Livingstone. No. He wants to court cheap popularity by saying things that people want to hear, and going round smiling at everyone and getting his picture in the local paper.

Well, I could easily do that, if I wanted to. I could go round smiling at everyone and having my picture in the paper and getting my wife to dress up in fancy outfits.

But I've got better things to do. I've got a parish to run, which means I've got to take tough decision. Not just sit about making jokes to people in pubs in my silly voice. And the most important decision I have to make is to excommunicate Mr Livingstone.

Yours infallibly,
His Holiness,
Tone The First.

A Personal Note

I know this is the sort of thing she would hate, but I would like to put on record my appreciation of the wonderful job Cherie is doing as the parish's "First Lady". She always looks marvellous, and she never complains, however much it is costing her to buy all those lovely clothes that you like to see her in. The last thing Cherie would want you to know is that she pays for all those dresses out of her own pocket, which she can ill afford to do. And let me tell you, they do not come cheap, especially if you have to order them specially from places like New York and Milan! There was certainly no suggestion on Cherie's behalf that the parish should subsidise her wardrobe from the collection plate, although I personally think that's a good idea, although Cherie would have a fit if I said so in public! T.B.

Meetings

■ Cherie's talk to the Women's Institute on "Sensible Family Planning" has been postponed until further notice. A.C.

Congratulations...

...to Peter Mandelson, head of the St Albion's Mission to St Gerry's. After only two weeks in the job, he has "banged heads together" and produced a miraculous result! As the Good Book says, "Blessed are the dealmakers, for they shall make deals" (Book of Trimble). I knew it was a good idea to get our former Churchwarden back into the team ministry, and haven't I been proved right!

Sun-Day!

This Sunday there will be a special thanksgiving service to celebrate 30 years of the Sun newspaper.

We all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to this unique newspaper which has done so much to brighten up all our lives. Some people might find the famous "Page Three" girls offensive. Or its lack of regard for the truth obnoxious. I know I do. But it would be unhelpful for me to say so, in case they start attacking me and asking for someone else to be the vicar.

Let's remember that wonderful quote by Vidal Sassoon, the famous World War One poet:

"*At the dumbing down of the Sun and the rising of the circulation, we will remember it.*"

How very true that is! T.B.

THE NEW ST ALBION PARISH NEWS *Book Two* IS OUT NOW – £4.99

Apology

IN the last few days we, in common with all other newspapers, may have given the impression that we thought Cherie Blair was looking in some way dowdy and frumpy.

Headlines such as "Is this the world's worst dressed woman?", "The Frocky Horror Show" and "Nightmare on Dowdy Street" may have reinforced this inference.

We now realise that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth in any of the above and that Cherie Blair is in fact an extraordinarily beautiful woman blooming with health and happiness and radiating an inner joy that transcends mere fashion.

We would like to apologise unreservedly to Mrs Blair for any distress that our earlier reports may inadvertently have caused.

You Name The People's Baby

Boys	Girls
Tony	Tonyella
Peter	Posh Spice
Alastair	Diana
Not Gordon	Not Harriet
Rupert	Maggie
Lord Bragg of Wigton	Baroness Jay

Phone now on the BLAIR BABE HOTLINE and win a pair of free tickets to hit musical *Tess of the D'Urbevilles.*

OLD QUEEN DEAD

A Nation Mourns

THE much-loved figure of Her Royal Highness the Quentin of Crisp has passed away in her 90th year.

With her trademark flowery hats, handbag and purple hair, she charmed the nation through nine decades of dedicated public life.

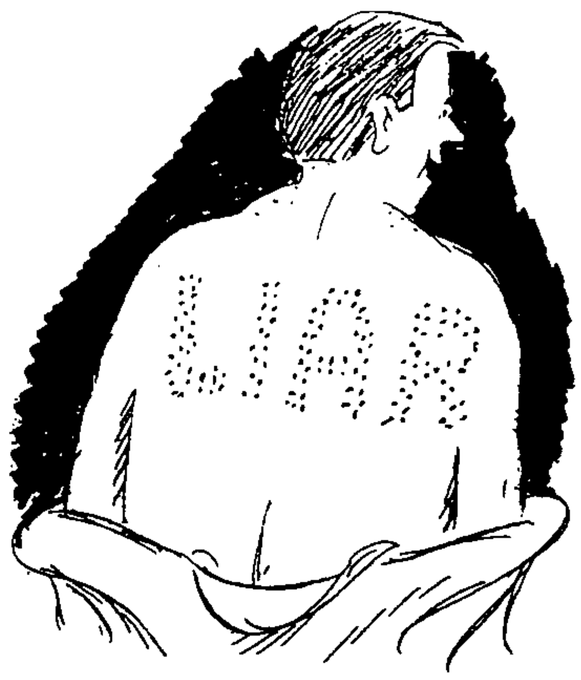
She was the darling of the armed forces and was loved by soldiers, airmen and particularly sailors.

Said one elderly guardsman, "I was deeply touched in St James's Park. It was a meeting I shall never forget."

Said Royal watcher Sir Neddington Twinkswell, 72, "She is irreplaceable. The younger generation do not have the style or the grace to carry it off. The young queens of today are not in the same league."

Souvenir packet of Quentin flavoured crisps available from Gnome Offers, Unit 94, The Trading Estate, Welwyn Garden City.

ARCHER SHOCK



The Moron Says

Jail This Man

HE HAS made up stories. He has lied. He has misled millions of people. Put me in jail at once.

© P. Moron, Editor, The Daily Moron.

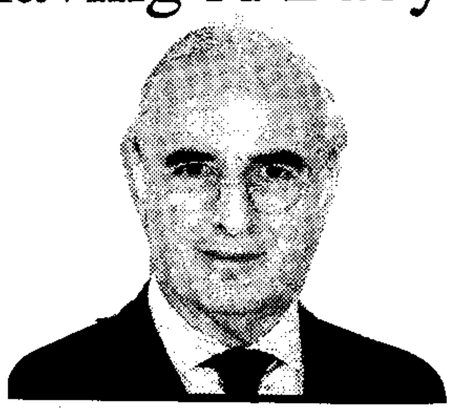
THATCHED HOUSE LODGE
RICHMOND PARK

October 27: Princess Alexandra, accompanied by the Rt Hon Sir Angus Ogilvy, this afternoon visited the Jobcentre, 1-3 Denmark Street, London WC2.

The Times

THE TIMES

Having A Baby



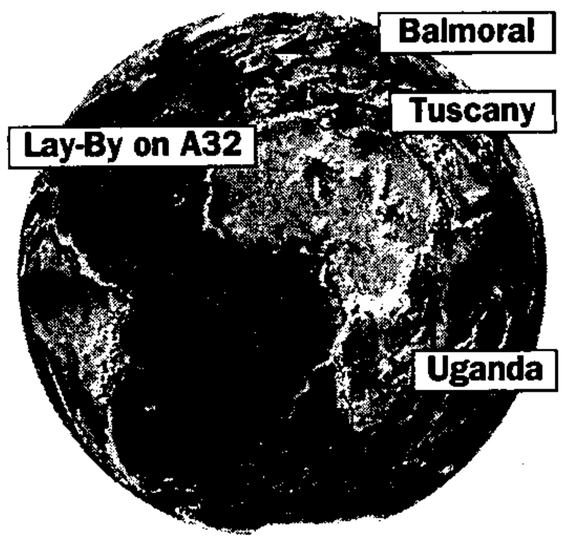
Medical Opinion

by Dr Thomas Stothardfraud

WHAT happens is that the Daddy and the Mummy, who love each other very much, go behind the gooseberry bush and nine months later the stork goes flying by with a new addition to the family.

You can contact the doctor directly at utterfraud@golfclub.co.uk

Spot The Baby



The Daily Telegraph invites you to put a cross where you think the Blair bun went into the oven!

● Phone now on the Spot The Baby Hotline and win two pairs of tickets to hit musical *Tess of the D'Urbervilles.*

ADVERTISEMENT

MAX CLIFFORD ANTIQUES

HAVE you got any old stories in your attic or perhaps a skeleton in your cupboard? It could be of value, you know.

A long-forgotten love affair with a pop star? Or a famous novelist friend with whom you have fallen out of love?

It may seem worthless to you, but newspapers will pay thousands of pounds for this stuff.

Why not consult an expert who will advise you as to the real worth of *your* memories.

Mr T.F. of London says, "I little dreamt that an old alibi I had completely forgotten about could be turned into £20,000!"

Visit our offices in Filth Street, Soho, and Mr Clifford will deal with you personally in complete confidence (with only a tape recorder running under the desk).

Maximillion Clifford – Your Pathway To A Fortune

★ YOUR CUT OUT 'N' KEEP SOUVENIR ★

THE FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

Mohamed Ali-Fayed — The "Fighting Fugger"

AT THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
(Over 15 weeks or until winner is declared)

Neil "I'm Innocent" Hamilton —"The Brown Envelopes"
(surely 'Bomber'? Ed.)

HOW THE TITANS COMPARE

PREVIOUS BOUTS

"The Fugger"	"Mr Sleaze"
Fought 15-round draw with Tiny "Tiny" Rowland, the German giant. Contest ended when the Port Said bruiser stole the Hun's emeralds and was arrested.	The Tatton Titan was KO'd by Marty "Mr Clean" Bell, who always fought in a white suit. Usually sends his wife into the ring if it looks like he's losing.

SIZE OF WALLET

Said to be "richest man in universe" (by himself).	Hoping to be saved by big libel pay day.

FIGHT PLAN

Ducking, diving, telling lies.	Ducking, diving, telling lies.

SECONDS

"Wee Georgie" Carman.

Possibly his last big fight before bowing out.

Des "Old Etonian" Brown.
Always on losing side in big fights, but this could be his big chance.

Referee: J. Cocklecarrot

ALL SEATS FREE – COME EARLY

POETRY CORNER

In memoriam Harry Gibbs, famous boxing referee

So. Farewell then
Harry Gibbs,
Famous
Boxing referee.

One...
Two...
Three...
Four...

Five...
Six...
Seven...
Eight...

Nine...
Ten...
You're out!

That was
Your catchphrase.

And now
You are.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

TV Highlights

The South Bank Show

THIS week, Melvyn Bragg guides us through the varied career of one of the nation's best-known actresses, Bianca from Eastenders – tracing her story from those far-off days as the red-haired, loud-mouthed cockney in a soap opera, right up to the present, as she takes on the demanding role of a red-haired, loud-mouthed cockney in a popular drama.

● *Next week: Gary Glitter and The Glitter Band.*

by THE 4th EARL OF HUSBAND

Doctor I'm worried. Since he had to leave the Lords he just sits there....
..looking bemused, lost, weary and hopeless.
Just like he did when he was in the Lords in fact

Apology

Owing to a production error, the word "hypocritical" was inadvertently inserted into Sir Michael Latham's column last week in describing John Prescott's chauffeured ride from his hotel to the Labour conference. We would like to apologise to Sir Michael.

Building

gddgdgggggggg ddggddg

FORMER Tanzanian Presi- dent Julius Nyerere died in hospital in London today.

Lancashire Evening Post

LABOUR NOUVEAU IS 'BIG FLOP'

by Our Political Staff **Phil Glass**

ONCE the cry of "Le Labour Nouveau est arrivé!" would have the middle-classes cheering and rushing to their nearest polling station.

But no more. This year's vintage has been branded "over-hyped, thin stuff which leaves a nasty taste in the mouth".

Experts say that the current batch "barely qualifies as red".

BLAIRJOLAIS

At tastings round the country consumers registered their disappointment.

"We thought Labour Nouveau would be an exciting new experience," said one, "but actually it's lightweight, unpleasant and increasingly hard to swallow."

ADVERTISEMENT

St Cakes, an independent boys boarding school in the Midlands, has an unexpected vacancy for a female drama teacher to take up her post at the start of the Tichaelmiss Term.

Duties include encouraging the boys' creativity through fantasy role-play and story-telling.

The successful applicant must be fully qualified in the following disciplines: cider-drinking, skinny-dipping and passing-out.

If you are a female drama teacher aged 30 or above who wants to go places (like the High Court) then **St Cakes** is the career opportunity of a lifetime.

Apply to the Headmaster, Mr R.J. Kipling MA, enclosing a CV and a recent photograph of yourself naked.

St Cakes School

St Cakes is currently occupying position number 374 in the Kama Sutra *(Surely 'League Tables'? Ed.).*

BLAIR GETS TOUGH ON DOWN AND OUTS

by Our Social Affairs Staff **Peers Morgan**

THE GOVERNMENT launched an offensive yesterday to rid the country of the spectacle of people "sleeping rough" on benches in the House of Lords.

Said Hopeless Czar, Margaret Jay, "You can't encourage these people by giving them a nice lunch and a warm place to sleep."

"You've got to get tough and kick them off the benches without a penny," she continued.

SOUP OF THE JAY

"This will force them to find something better to do than lie around getting in the way of the government."

EXCLUSIVE SERIALISATION

ENGLAND'S 1000 BEST BORES

No. 94. St Simon, Jenkins

BUILT in 1943, St Simon's looms over Wapping with its self-important façade and somewhat empty interior. We sense immediately an aura of overpowering tedium, as we penetrate the gloomier recesses of this forbidding edifice. It is a relief when our eye finally alights on his highly-decorative wife, the Blessed Gayle of Hunnicutt, who has worn well over the years. But there is no doubt that St Simon's is one of the outstanding bores of the last millennium.

Late News

KEN CLARKE AGREES NOT TO EMBARRASS PARTY

KEN CLARKE today pledged not to further embarrass the Labour party by again sharing a platform with the Prime Minister over the issue of Europe.

"What hope does Tony have of convincing Britain the Euro is a good idea," said one clearly angry Number 10 source, "if losers like fatty Clarke keep backing it?"

"Of course, they're right," said the chastened former Chancellor. "I'll never do it again."

GLENDA SLAGG

The Mother of All Fleet Street!

ROYAL BABY SPECIAL

HATS OFF to Cherie Blair! Didn't you shed a little tear when you heard the nooz that Mr Stork would be poppin' down the chimney at Number Ten with a little bundle of joy!?!?!

What wonderful tidings for all us gals of a certain age who thought that the pitter patter of tiny feet would never be heard again??!? All together now – Aaah!!!!

CHERIE BLAIR – what a thoughtless cow??!?! Doesn't she know how dangerous it is to have a kiddie at her age!?!? What a selfish thing to do??! By the time the little toddler is ten, Tony will have one foot in the grave and she'll be waiting in for Meals on Wheels!?? What sort of life is that for a littl'un to look forward to?? No football in the park for him or her – just pushing the old folks round in their wheelchairs??! All together now – Uuuurgh!!?

THREE CHEERS for Cherie and Tony!?!? At last there's someone who believes in the family!?! The stuffy corridors of Number Ten will for the first time resound to the sound of a happy infant a-crawlin' and a-bawlin', a-cooin' and a poo-in'!! All together now – coochee coochee coo!!!?!

TONY BLAIR – what was he thinking of?!? Who wants the Prime Minister kept awake at night when he should be thinking about Northern Ireland!!?! We want his mind on the job – and not that one, mister!!? All together now – Boochee! Boochee! Boo!

HATS AND trousers off to Blair!? Here's one world leader who has got lead in his pencil!?! And isn't it heartwarming that at Tony and Cherie's age the candle of love is still burning bright??! Pass me the tissues, Mister Reader, I've just gotta have a li'l weep!!

WILLIAM HAGUE and Ffion take note!! You two should be having a good Fff-un time between the sheets!?! (Geddit??) Or you'll be washed up Fffor ever!?! Geddit???!

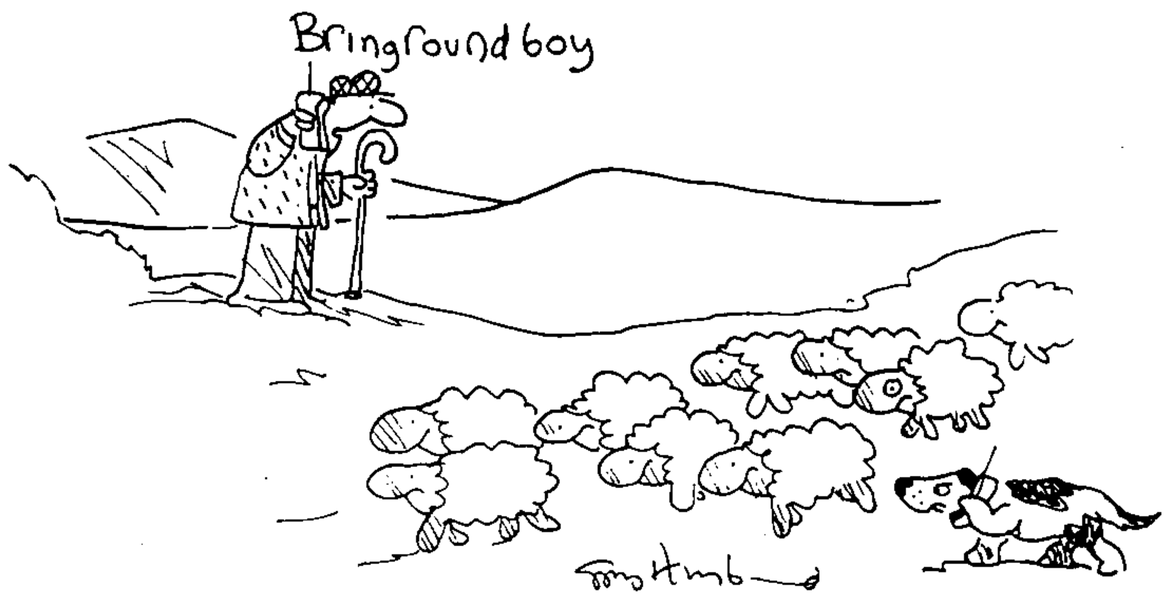
HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Debonair Dads!?!

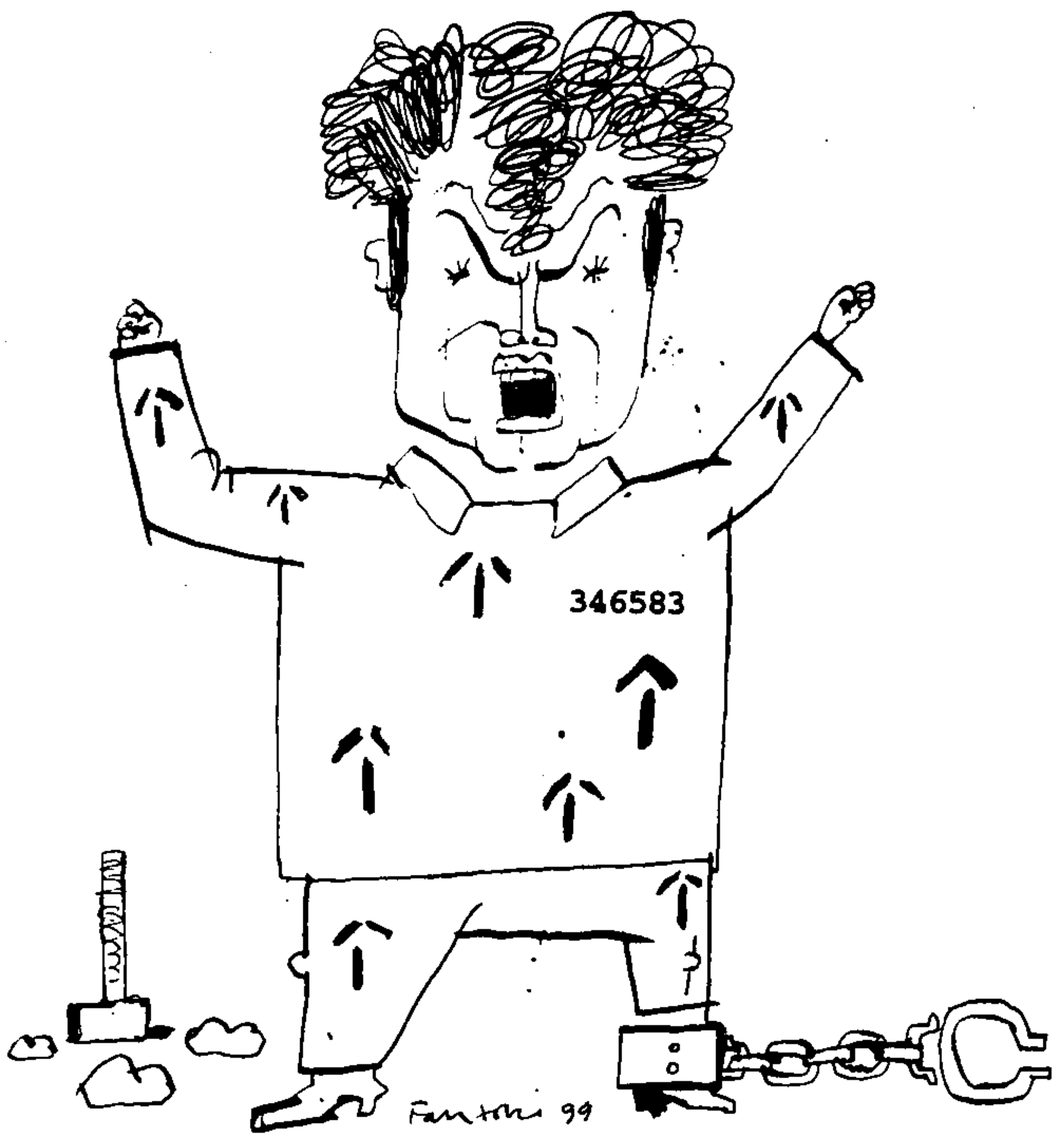
TONY BLAIR: He's put Cherie into New Labour!?! Geddit???

THE PRIME MINISTER: He can have his Third Way with me any time!?!?

TONY: Why stop at four children – let's go for Number Ten!! (Geddit??!?) Keep it up, Tone!! (Geddit?!?!) Time for a big election!! *(That's enough filth. Ed.)*

Byebee!!!! Geddit!?!?!





"Do you wanna be in my gang..."

GARY GROCER GUILTY

by Our Filth Staff
Blue Max Clifford Chatterley

THE AGEING former prime minister Gary Grocer (real name Edward Heath) yesterday denied sensational allegations in a downmarket Sunday newspaper (the Sunday Telegraph) that he had "an unhealthy secret passion" for dictators.

The newspaper had claimed that Heath was "in love" with a long succession of power-crazed over-age tyrants, ranging from the late Mao Tse-Tung to the late Marshal Tito.

GROCER INDECENCY

Looking raddled and paunchy, the disgraced former prime minister defended himself, claiming that the press had attempted to smear him by digging up true stories about his past.

"I have nothing to be ashamed of," he said. "It is quite true that I met these people on a number of occasions, and we may have exchanged gifts, but it went no further than that.

"To accuse me of tyrantophilia is plainly ludicrous. Chairman Mao was a very nice man, unlike Dominic Lawson, who is a rude, bad-tempered bully just like myself."

Grocer Heath is 97.

Secret loves of the Grocer — pics pp. 18-26

GLITTER VICTIM SPEAKS OUT

by Our Reporter **Pippa Ratzi**

THE TRAGIC woman at the centre of the Gary Glitter case previously only known as Miss X has come forward, so as to let the world know the horror she's experienced.

"I was just a naïve innocent girl," she said in a trembling voice, "when a filthy old man came to my door and offered me £10,000 if I'd do things for him, things that I knew were wrong. But Max was very persuasive and wouldn't take no for an answer. The next thing I knew he was thrusting a huge cheque at me from the News of the World he worked for, and I became putty in his hands.

"How can these sick perverts be allowed to prey on innocent girls like me? Of course, he promised he'd look after me but as soon as he got what he wanted and the story was published he was off like a shot."

Since Gary Glitter was cleared of the charges, Alison says the memory of losing her £25,000 bonus will haunt her for many years to come.

■ **More sanctimonious self-serving guff pp. 2-98**

A Century In Photographs

Oh I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside

1927: Summer In Bognor

Holidaymakers flocked to the seaside in August 1927 as temperatures soared into the high sixties.

In Margate an ice-cream cone melted, and in Skegness a woman was taken to hospital suffering from suspected heatstroke.

Also in that eventful year, Everton won the FA Cup, beating Wolverhampton Wanderers 1-0; there was a strike of umbrella makers in Watford; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill introduced an unpopular tax on bowler hats.

Picture of sisters Maureen and Doreen Stothard at Bognor Regis is taken from The Times Book Of The Century's Most Boring Photographs, not available in all good bookshops (price £59.99).

That Queen's Speech In Full

"My Government has done a wonderful job of making Britain a much happier, more successful country. Everywhere one goes, one sees happy, smiling, healthy, well-educated people saying 'Isn't it wonderful what my Government has done?'

"My Government is not stopping there. My Government will introduce a number of measures to make things even more wonderful.

"My Government therefore urges everyone to vote Labour in gratitude, or should I say 'to gratefully vote Labour' which is the correct usage in the New Queen's English, where we are all entitled to happily split infinitives.

"A Happy Christmas to you all."

© Her Majesty the Prime Minister.

Those New Measures

Freedom of Information
New Bill to provide every citizen with right to read on internet how wonderful Government is.

Countryside
New Bill to allow every citizen to go for walks in country.

Transport
Major shake-up of transport policy, to give everyone right to travel by public transport (if available).

Poverty
To be abolished.

Crime
To be eliminated.

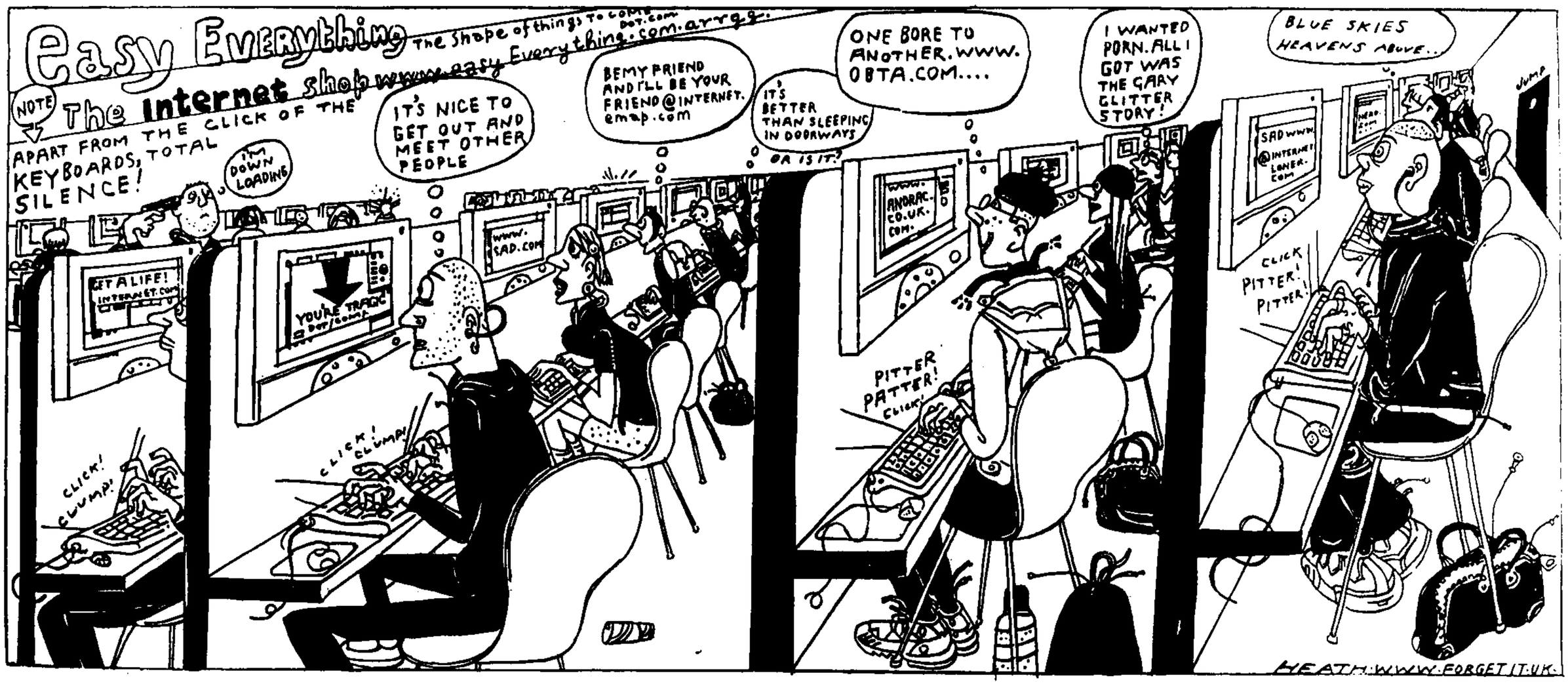
Trial by Jury
Ditto.

Hospitals
Ditto.

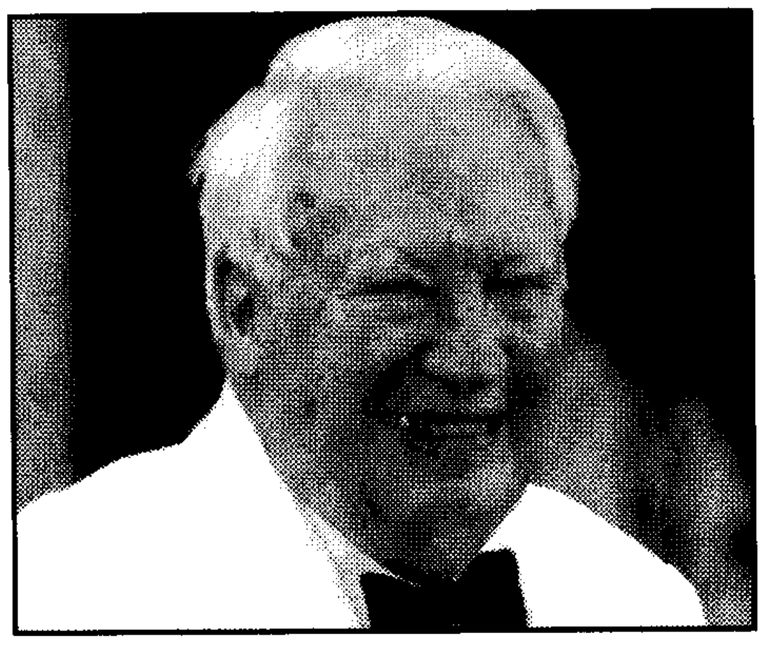
Eduction Education Education
Ditto Ditto Ditto.

(That's enough measures. Ed.)

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW


Easy Everything
The Internet shop www.easyEverything.com
The Shape of things to come
APART FROM THE CLICK OF THE KEYBOARDS, TOTAL SILENCE!
NOTE
IT'S NICE TO GET OUT AND MEET OTHER PEOPLE
I'M DOWN LOADING
BE MY FRIEND AND I'LL BE YOUR FRIEND@INTERNET.emap.com
IT'S BETTER THAN SLEEPING IN DOORWAYS
OR IS IT?
ONE BORE TO ANOTHER. WWW.OBTA.COM....
I WANTED PORN. ALL I GOT WAS THE GARY GLITTER STORY!
BLUE SKIES HEAVENS ABOVE...
JUMP
GET A LIFE! INTERNET.COM
YOU'RE TRACK BOT/COMP
WWW.SAD.COM
WWW.ANORAC.CO.UK.COM
SAD WWW @INTERNET LONER.COM
CLICK! CLUMP!
CLICK! CLUMP!
PITTER PATTER! CLICK!
CLICK PITTER! PITTER!
HEATH WWW.FORGETIT.UK

DIARY



SIR EDWARD HEATH'S 10 MEN OF THE MILLENNIUM

General Idi Amin

President Amin had a remarkably sensitive eye for Tang Dynasty chinaware. Of course, his country never stopped giving him trouble. But he was a man of great character, and he never allowed his tiresome people to distract him from amassing a most impressive private collection of exquisite vases.

Some now say that Amin was a cannibal, that he enjoyed consuming his enemies. That may be so, but he was also a great gourmet, and would have made sure that they were cooked to the highest possible standard. Nor should we allow these minor details to distract us from his very real charm. Do let's not carp. Historians may argue, with the benefit of hindsight, that I should have taken a leaf from his book and consumed Margaret Thatcher during her disastrous spell as my secretary of state for Education. But I did not have the necessary implements. Besides, I loathe gristle.

Joseph Stalin

Most people now remember Joe for his impressive moustaches, but to me he was also a great leader. He showed enormous character and style, and – unlike the present Conservative leadership – he was never discourteous.

I am well aware that the current generation of historians say he killed a million here, a million there. But that's historians for you. Always trying to play the numbers game. Little do they realise the immense pressure the poor man was under.

Incidentally, Stalin once presented me with some exquisite Waterford crystal, which I bring out for special guests when they come to Sunday luncheon. There was nothing Joseph didn't know about Waterford crystal. A most civilised and impressive world statesman, who would certainly have supported Britain's position in the European community.

King Henry VIII

He never allowed himself to get bogged down in the day-to-day detail of his various marriages. Instead, he concentrated on the larger issues. He took firm, decisive action when needed. No one wants to behead a wife, of course they don't. But sometimes it's the only appropriate action.

Harold Macmillan

Macmillan has been much maligned by the present right-wing generation. But he had enormous style. He used to have his luncheon – a decent claret, oysters, a pheasant or two, cheese, meringues, brandy and coffee, and then a main course – brought in on an individual silver tray with his family coat of arms while he was presiding over our Cabinet meetings. After he had finished, he would turn to the Foreign Secretary, say "Any news from abroad?", slump forward in his chair and take a well-earned nap. Wilson ruined all that, of course. He used to work all around the clock – but to what effect? No one remembers Wilson now, do they? And for all his beavering away, he's still dead! Didn't do him much good, did it?!!! Meanwhile, I'm still going strong!!! One has to keep a sense of perspective in these matters.

King Herod

Sadly, I never met the man, but he offered the people of his country firm leadership when they most needed it. I am fully aware that he had immense difficulties with many in the juvenile sector, but he dealt with them swiftly and decisively. Frankly, you can't go around hiding in bullrushes and expect to get away with it. The poor man had a country to run.

King Ethelred

Say what you like about King Ethelred, he was always ready.

General Galtieri

At least he had the guts to stand up to her, which is more than one can say for the Bakers and Gummers and Hurds of this world.

And one should never forget that Galtieri was a superb connoisseur of porcelain. He was kind enough to give me a delightful Wedgewood tea-service when I was over on a visit. We have exchanged Christmas cards ever since.

King Richard III

Richard had real charisma, and provided true leadership at a time of crisis. If you don't understand these simple facts, you're a crashing bore.

I know some people hold him responsible for the death of the two Princes in the Tower. But these people simply don't understand the nature of leadership. You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Or so my chef tells me. I leave that department to him. But if those Princes were proving a confounded nuisance on all the important issues of the day then they should have expected to be smothered with pillows while they lay sleeping. If they didn't understand that, then they didn't understand anything.

And who let them stay in the Tower in the first place? Richard, of course. He was a most generous host, with a real appreciation of good wine. Those who carp on about his shortcomings are simply proving their own lamentable ignorance of history.

Chairman Mao Tse Tung

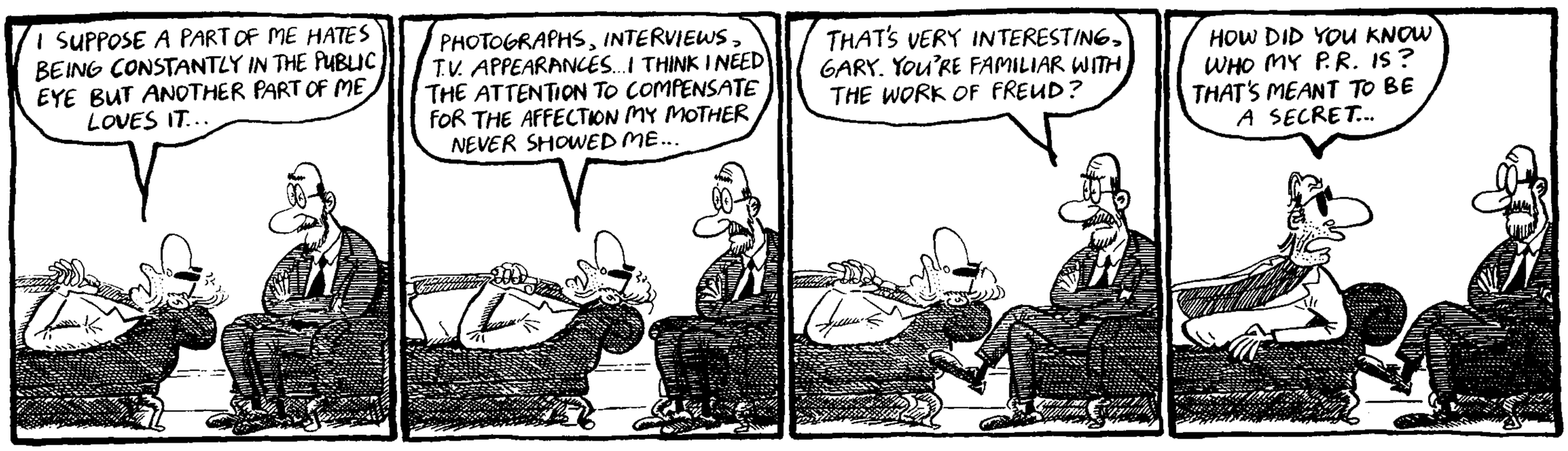
A most effective chairman of an often uncooperative country. On a personal level, he was immensely thoughtful. He was always pleased to see me. In pride of place on my dinner-table is a delightful sculpture of a peasant worker, constructed with extraordinary skill entirely out of human skin. A most treasured gift. Predictably, the right-wing fringe claim he was a "mass murderer". Utter nonsense. Mao did not murder people. He had them put to death, which is quite a different thing. And if you don't appreciate that, you're dafter than I thought!!

Lord Raglan

A first-class military commander, whose achievement at Balaclava was, in hindsight, wholly successful. It suits the stupid right-wing historians of today to claim Raglan was in some way ill-suited for the job. This shows how little they know. The Charge of the Light Brigade was an outstanding success. So much so that they emerged from their experience even lighter. I learnt an awful lot about leadership from Lord Raglan, you know. Without his example to guide me, I honestly don't think I'd have been able to implement my successful phree day week.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


I SUPPOSE A PART OF ME HATES BEING CONSTANTLY IN THE PUBLIC EYE BUT ANOTHER PART OF ME LOVES IT...
PHOTOGRAPHS, INTERVIEWS, T.V. APPEARANCES... I THINK I NEED THE ATTENTION TO COMPENSATE FOR THE AFFECTION MY MOTHER NEVER SHOWED ME...
THAT'S VERY INTERESTING, GARY. YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE WORK OF FREUD?
HOW DID YOU KNOW WHO MY P.R. IS? THAT'S MEANT TO BE A SECRET...

Craig Brown will be reading from The Craig Brown Omnibus at Waterstone's, 9-13 Garrick Street, Covent Garden, at 6.30 pm on Friday, 3 December.

Literary Review

Luvvie's labour lost

Acting Up
David Hare
(Faber, £9.99)

THE late Alan Clark MP can now be seen as one of the most influential writers of his generation. Readers of his *Diaries* instantly wanted to emulate him. The drawback is that mother-and-two-daughters sex is hard to arrange; but it has proved relatively easy for public figures to persuade a publisher to take their diaries.

From Woodrow Wyatt to Gyles Brandreth, personalities have been drawn to the literary form of the page with the dated paragraphs. Now Sir David Hare – the excitable playwright – has published a day to day record of the period in which, aged 50, he made his professional acting debut, performing *Via Dolorosa*, his monologue about a visit to Jerusalem.

To be fair, the precise comparison Hare would hope to evoke is not Clark but Alan Bennett and Simon Gray, two dramatists who have published their production notebooks. But both Bennett and Gray understood that a diarist needs to be self-deprecating: each used a gently self-mocking tone which acknowledged the vanity and solipsism which is the greatest risk of both the profession in which they work and the literary form they were employing.

Even Alan Clark, a figure of some grandeur in person, was sassy enough as an author to take himself down a bit in print. It's a measure of how risky the diary form is that one of the most reliable satirical devices – across Pooter, *Adrian Mole*, *Bridget Jones*, *Private Eye* – has been the diary written by a person lacking in self-knowledge.

Arise, Sir David. This was always an unexpected project because, a few years ago, Hare announced an antipathy to being interviewed. He felt that his public persona – cold, clever, arrogant – was being turned against his plays by critics. Always short-tempered – while Stoppard is known among luvvies as the Michael Palin of playwrights, Hare is the Basil Fawlty – he was hurt by the amusement which greeted his explanation that he had accepted a knighthood, despite being a political radical, because he felt it to be "new" Labour's way of apologising for its earlier ill grace over *The Absence Of War*, a drama known in the theatre as Kinnock Lear, in which a windbaggy reforming Labour leader loses an election because his advisers make him something he isn't.

The mystery of why a highly sensitive playwright would choose to publish his diaries is never resolved in a volume which provides material his critics will turn against him for years. The title is calculated to charm. *Acting Up* is what toddlers are said to do. But, as this petulant chronicle of Hare's uncanny daily rightness on all matters proceeds, the book's name comes to seem depressingly literal.

"I walked away. I have been white with fury all night", notes Hare after an early disagreement with *Via Dolorosa*'s director, Stephen Daldry. Subsequently, he has what the Yanks call a "hissy fit" every few pages.

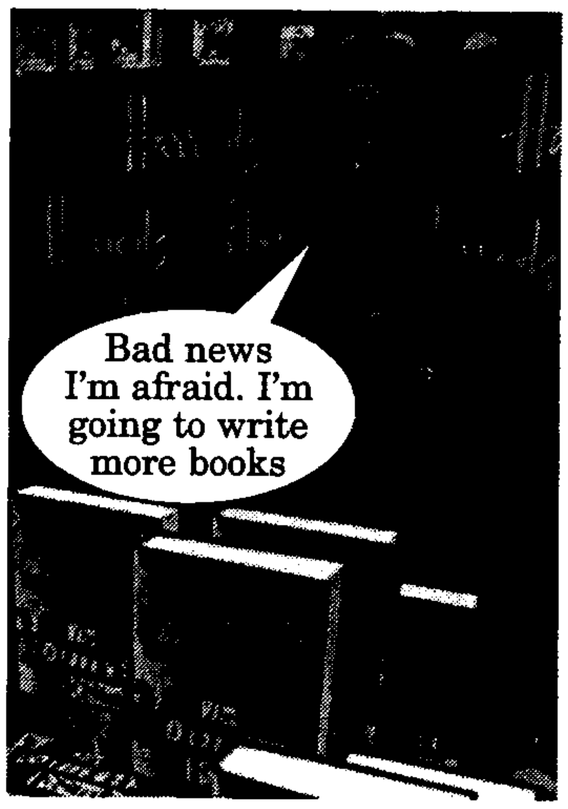
The text's other problem is luvvieness. Fretful that he lacks the technique to be an actor, Hare shows himself in his diary entries to have the temperament: "As I walked home, I was quite frightened. I was passing Hampstead Cemetry. It's always my favourite part of the walk because I like saying hello to Hugh Gaitksell and Anton Wallbrook. Some days I even blow a kiss at Kay Kendall. Then I suddenly realised that the strange tightness in my stomach was fear."

Most professional writers who saw themselves looking at those lines on the word processor would feel their tummy tensing but Hare – quite unlike Bennett – makes the common mistake of thinking that diary-writing means printing lines you would usually delete.

This lethal relaxation of his writer's ear extends to the unwise inclusion of private conversations with friends and family. One day in New York, Hare notes: "Then my son Joe came on the line. 'I know this is going to sound wanky', he says. 'But I can't see any difference between your young work and your mature work. They're the same voice.'" This passage has the effect of puffing up Hare's work while, indeed, making his son sound a bit, er, wanky.

Another aspect of the writing reveals another of Hare's frequent sensitivities: the fear that his lifestyle and income disqualify him from the socialism his dramas still espouse. A strength of Simon Gray's diaries is the detail of the flights he takes, the meals he eats, the hotel rooms in which he stays. But when, for example, Hare flies back to London for one day to attend rehearsals for a London project, we are left guessing in which section of the plane he sat. No published diarist is completely honest but, when the omissions become obviously tactical, the reader loses faith.

Few people would turn to a book like this seeking merely a hymn to the courage of actors: a weakness which this book shares with his worst play, *Amy's View*. They want a properly textured account of the working life of a leading theatrical figure. What they get is hissy fits and luvvie flourishes. If knighthoods really are a kind of social apology system – as Hare so notoriously claimed – maybe he should give his back to apologise for this.



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ LORD ARCHER's campaign adviser Stephan Shakespeare has issued the threat HarperCollins dreads: Archer's withdrawal from the mayoral race would give him "more time to write".

In fact Archer's writing career is almost as moribund as his political one. His latest pisspoor effort, *The Eleventh Commandment*, failed to reach number one on the bestseller list and spent a few weeks in the middle of the table before dropping out altogether.

The claim in HarperCollins' catalogue that Archer is "Britain's top-selling novelist" joins the lengthening list of porkies with which he is associated.

■ HACKS covering Weidenfeld & Nicolson's 50th anniversary disagreed on how much champagne was drunk at the launch party in 1949.

Derwent May in the *Times* said the party drank "109 bottles of the cheapest champagne that the company could buy". Publishing News, working from the same press handout which quoted the figure from Nigel Nicolson's memoirs, agreed. But the *Guardian* went with the number given by Anthony "Fatty" Cheetham in his speech – 137.

Having been "refreshed" anew, few grateful freeloaders then brought up the frequent financial crises experienced by Weidenfeld & Nicolson throughout its history.

■ NEIL HAMILTON's dreadful new Robson book *Great Political Eccentrics* may be out — but what has happened to *The Media Assassins*, his threatened heavily autobiographical novel?

It was due to be published by the schizophrenic non-vanity publisher Aspire/GreeNZone (*Eyes passim*) in June, but the publication date came and went and the book has not materialised.

Curiously Aspire seems to have gone the way of Hamilton's novel. The company's Exeter phone number has been disconnected, with a recorded announcement directing callers to a mobile phone number. Has its office operation been slimmed down to the point of non-existence?

■ HAVING had a benign growth removed from one of her breasts in her late teens, former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell's autobiography *If Only* carries the admirable statement: "All Geri's royalties are being donated to Breast Cancer Care".

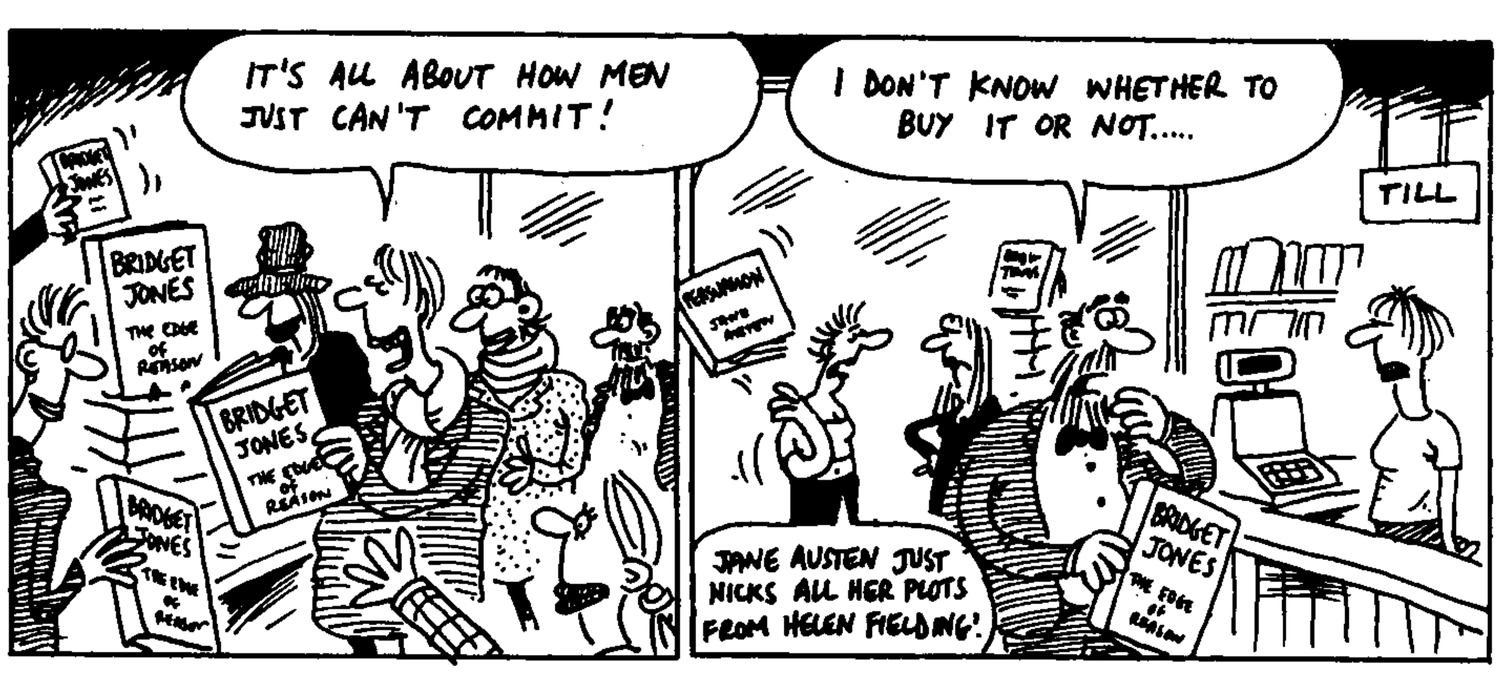
Helpfully the book's illustrations include several pictures from her topless modelling days, just in case anyone has forgotten what the breasts in question look like.

■ PROMOTING wider reading is one thing, but the software used by online bookseller bol.com to recommend alternative purchases to customers may be taking the concept too far, if one *Eye* reader's experience is anything to go by.

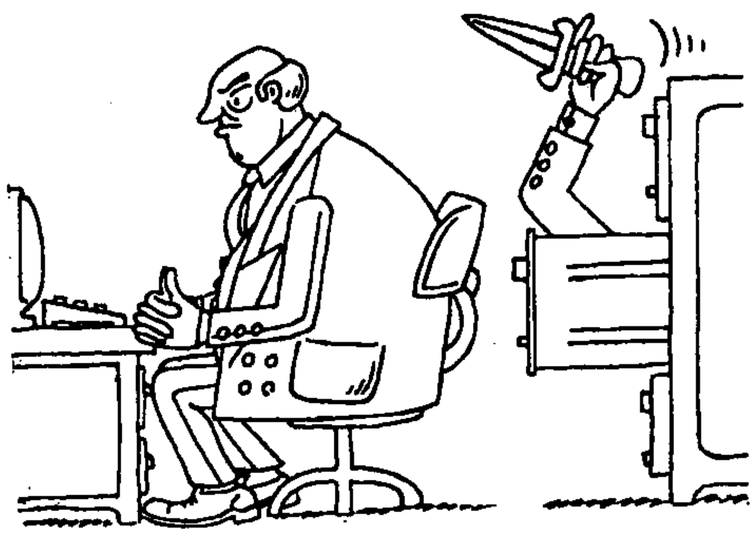
Having logged on to order the children's book *Kipper's Christmas Eve* by Mick Inkpen, he was shocked to see the site claim that - along with Terry Pratchett's *The Fifth Elephant* and the book of the BBC's *Walking with Dinosaurs* series – readers of Inkpen's book (generally aged between 5 and 10) had "also enjoyed" *John Major: The Autobiography*.

Easy to see the link from Major to dinosaurs, but a connection with *Kipper's Christmas Eve* or Pratchett's fantasy world is harder to define.

'Bookworm'


IT'S ALL ABOUT HOW MEN JUST CAN'T COMMIT!
BRIDGET JONES THE EDGE OF REASON
I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TO BUY IT OR NOT.....
TILL
JANE AUSTEN JUST NICKS ALL HER PLOTS FROM HELEN FIELDING!

IN THE BACK



THE ASYLUM BILL

Clutching at Straw

"FAIRER, faster, firmer" — home secretary Jack Straw chanted this mantra twice when the immigration and asylum bill (legislation that will all but close our ports to those seeking sanctuary) received the royal assent this month.

The home office's new Stepford wife – immigration minister Barbara Roche – duly repeated it to refugee groups in north London last week as she sought to defend her party's asylum policy. From the back of the hall Salah Mohamed, a 47-year-old former Sudanese civil servant, asked her what was fair, firm or fast about his claim for refuge. He has been trying to get Britain to grant him asylum for six years.

For two terrible months in 1990 Salah was held in one of the Sudan's notorious "ghost-houses" — torture centres for the fundamentalist military regime headed by Omar al-Bashir. There he was tied from a pole, beaten, abused and deprived of sleep and food. He was forced to listen when his fellow prisoners were similarly tortured. He was detained in a tiny overcrowded cell with barely room to sit and a shift system for lying down. He was left to wonder if he would be next when his cellmates were removed and gleeful guards would report their execution.

Salah's "offence" was to be a member of the opposition Sudanese Communist party. In the 1980s he had served another two years for exactly the same "crime". That he was one of the country's most senior civil servants, deputy first under-secretary in the ministry of economic planning and investment, offered him no protection. It was only after international pressure that he was transferred to Kober prison in north Khartoum and, he believes, only after Amnesty International made him a prisoner of conscience that he was released.

Even then he was placed under surveillance and in 1993, instead of being detained and tortured, he was ordered to turn up for his beatings on a daily basis at the security forces headquarters in Khartoum. Over a period of 23 days he was beaten with the leg of a chair, a thick belt and the barrel of a gun. His hands were bent backwards so they swelled to twice their size.

In December that year he obtained an exit visa to visit family in the UK. Salah was already contemplating fleeing his country for good and the sudden disappearance of the secretary-general of the Communist party, Mohamed Nugad, for whom Salah had campaigned, convinced him to claim asylum.

This year's Amnesty International report on Sudan shows nothing has changed since Salah was tortured for his politics. And there can be little doubt that if Salah is returned to Sudan he risks imprisonment, torture and death.

Not a complex case for officials at the immigration headquarters in the aptly named Lunar House or ministers to decide. But six years down the line Salah lives in limbo – still waiting for a reply. Nothing firm, fast or fair about that.

Lairgesse oblige...

ANOTHER curious tale has come to light concerning the tireless supervision of our legal system by the lord chancellor, the great Lord Irvine of Lairg.

On the last day of the last parliamentary session, one of the government's more controversial pieces of legislation – the immigration and asylum bill – finally made it on to the statute book in the nick of time. Few would have noticed a tiny last-minute amendment inserted into the bill while it was in the Lords, on instructions from the lord chancellor's office.

The amendment came in a schedule setting out the composition of the immigration appeal tribunal. To serve on this body is not a job to be sniffed at. Its members earn between £70,000 and £78,000 a year, plus £153 appearance fee for each day they sit (more than John Major used to earn as prime minister).

Section 1.2 of the schedule sets out the qualifications for the legal adjudicators who have to sit as chairman on each tribunal panel. And, as originally drafted, the bill confirmed the existing rule that such appointees must be legally qualified and have served as a practising lawyer for at least seven years.

But the amendment inserted by the lord chancellor's office added a new sub-clause. This provided that someone might also be appointed as a legal member, simply if "he has such legal and other experience as appears to the lord chancellor to make him suited for appointment as a legally qualified member". In other words, the lord chancellor has also now been given discretionary power to appoint almost anyone as a legal adjudicator, even if they totally lack the usual qualifications.

Why should Lord Irvine have been so keen to get this clause added to the bill? It may not be irrelevant that in tribunal circles it is commonly referred to as "the Storey amendment" – a reference to Dr Hugo Storey, a law lecturer at Leeds university and a friend of his former fellow-lecturer Geoff Hoon MP, who until earlier this year was Lord Irvine's parliamentary secretary.

Some time back Dr Storey was appointed to the tribunal as a part-time adjudicator along with his wife, a Pakistani (he has converted to Islam). He was then, against all the rules which should have required him to be a qualified solicitor or barrister, appointed as a full-time adjudicator on the understanding that he would work to obtain the necessary professional qualifications.

When there seemed to be no sign of this happening, colleagues eventually asked why Dr Storey was being allowed to by-pass the normal procedures. It was then that the miracle occurred. No longer was there any need for resentful nit-picking about the rules because – hey presto – the rules were changed. The good doctor is now perfectly entitled to continue in his £70,000 a year-plus post, simply as someone deemed personally "suitable" by the lord chancellor.

Incidentally, a correction is due to the item in our last issue on the trouble caused in the immigration appeals tribunal by the idiosyncratic behaviour of another member, Mrs Rosie Mannion. Due to a transcription error, it was stated that Mrs Mannion likes to insist that any tribunal on which she is serving should begin at 10am rather than the normal time of 10.30. This should have read that she likes her tribunals to begin at 11am rather than the normal time of 10 o'clock.

Just Fancy That 1

FIVE months after his ennoblement, Lord Grabiner QC has been appointed by Gordon Brown to round up social security scroungers and generally give the idle poor a hard time.

As a treasury statement explained: "He is the living embodiment of the work ethic."

Indeed. As befits a "new" Labour peer, Grabiner earns more than £1m a year at the commercial Bar, and is known in the trade as "the first QC to break the £700-an-hour barrier".

NUKES

Hype stings eternal

THE proposed privatisation of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL) shows that when it comes to safety-critical industries "new" Labour won't stint on... PR.

Not only has Bell Pottinger been hired by BNFL to push the sale (see last Eye), but the department of trade is advertising in the *EC Official Journal* for a PR firm of its own to handle the privatisation. For such a "new" Labour scheme, however, the sale is saddled with old Tory ghosts.

Bell Pottinger hired Kevin Murray to lead the team pitching for the contract. Murray is an expert in nuclear privatisation: he was head of corporate affairs at AEA Technology, the product of the Tories' part-privatisation of the Atomic Energy Authority. The two main results of that sale were exposed by the health and safety executive (HSE) and the national audit office (NAO).

After privatisation the HSE was forced in 1998 to close the AEA's Dounreay nuclear plant because it was unsafe. "Our main finding is that organisational changes within the UKAEA over the last four years have so weakened the management and technical base at Dounreay that it is not in a good position to tackle its principle mission, which is the decommissioning of the site." The HSE was shocked to learn that, post privatisation, managers at Dounreay were so "over dependent" on contractors they no longer really understood how their plant worked.

If the sale didn't make safety sense, it did not make financial sense either. The NAO found that after the AEA privatisation there was a massive boost in its share value, showing that another public asset had been flogged at rock bottom prices.

ENERGY

Coal fired?

THE entire Scottish coal industry is threatened with collapse early next year because of a deal struck between chums of "new" Labour, the utilities giant Enron, and English, Welsh and Scottish Railways (EWS), the UK's largest railway freight carrier.

The situation has become critical since September with EWS unable to provide over half the wagons needed to transport coal from companies such as Scottish Coal to power stations in England owned by Powergen, National Power and Eastern Energy, because the wagons are taken up with the Enron deal.

Scottish mining firms have the contracts and the coal capacity, but these are worthless without a means of transporting the coal. Road haulage is neither an economically nor environmentally viable option.

An industry source told the *Eye*: "If something does not happen and happen quickly, Scottish Coal will be out of business by early next year. We are talking about a company that employs 600 people and a further 700 indirectly." All Scottish mining firms are in a similar predicament, he added.

The main beneficiaries of the EWS/Enron contract are other US firms. Enron supplies American company Edison Mission Energy, owner of two generators at Fiddler's Ferry in Cheshire and Ferrybridge in West Yorkshire, with coal from Poland and Columbia. EWS, meanwhile, is owned by American railroad company, Wisconsin Central.

This is not the first time Britain's coal industry has suffered at the hands of Enron. In June the government broke its own moratorium on gas-fired power stations, imposed to protect the coal industry, to give Enron – a Labour party sponsor — the go-ahead to build a gas station at Teeside.

On 9 November energy minister Helen Liddell announced that consent had not been granted to Enron to build a gas power station on the Isle of Grain in Kent, but the application has not been refused outright, merely put on hold.

CORPORATE WELFARE

Signing on, cashing in

WHILE Labour prepares to squeeze benefits for the disabled, it is still doling out money to very able bodied corporations.

"Regional selective assistance grants" are a major form of corporate welfare involving big cash payments to companies that promise to "create" or "save" jobs. At the end of October the department of trade announced changes to the industrial development advisory board (IDAB), the committee that authorises the grants, to give it that special "new" Labour feel.

For example, trade minister Richard Caborn appointed Lord Swraj Paul to IDAB. He is a model "new" Labour businessman who built up his firm, Caparo Steel, from scratch to become the 63rd richest person in Britain, worth a reported £325m.

However, while Lord Paul seems to embody all the virtues of enterprise and self-reliance so valued by Tony Blair, in January 1999 Caparo Engineering Ltd of Hartlepool went cap in hand to the government to beg for, and get, £170,000 of regional assistance (category "A" to "create" jobs). This was not the first time Lord Paul's firm had "signed on". In late 1998 Caparo Industries plc requested, and was given, £750,000 worth of regional selective assistance to "safeguard" jobs in the West Midlands. Given Lord Paul's reliance on regional assistance, it's hard to imagine he will be too strict on other businessmen who apply for the same kind of cash.

Caborn also announced that IDAB member Victor Blank was to become chair of the committee (taking over from Anthony Cleaver – see *Eyes passim*). Blank is already chairman of Trinity Mirror, and as such is responsible for one of Labour's few consistent supporters in the press. He was appointed to IDAB by Labour last year, around the time he was given a KBE in the new year's honours list.

Blank was involved in one of the worst rip-offs of public money of recent times. He was a merchant banker at Charterhouse, and backed the management buy-out of the rail leasing company Porterbrook. Porterbrook was bought from the government at a fantastic knock-down price then instantly resold to Stagecoach. Blank shared in the £32m windfall, made entirely at public expense and memorably criticised by the national audit office (NAO). Making Blank chief guardian of money doled out to scrounging businesses looks a bit like putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop.

The prime minister launched the latest round of welfare cutbacks during an interview on Sky television, stressing that benefit should only be spent on those who "really, really need it". Sky is an odd platform from which to lecture on financial responsibility given that the News International empire has paid almost no corporation tax since 1985.

In late 1998, Sky Subscribers Services Ltd of Bathgate proved to the IDAB that it "really, really needed" £975,000 for "data processing". Nor was this News International's first rattle of the begging bowl. In late 1996 HarperCollins cadged £250,000 in grants to "save" jobs at its printing operation in Glasgow. The grants make Sky's donation for the Dome look more like recycling than generosity. Another Dome sponsor, Boots plc, got £990,000 to stop it sacking packaging staff in Lanarkshire in the first quarter of 1998.

Sky is just one among many firms who cannot plead poverty but still get big payouts. Here are some of the others:

ABB is an international engineering giant — big enough to build China's giant "three Gorges" Dam which will displace 1.2 million Chinese, and big enough to get work on the Ilisu Dam in Turkey, which will flood Kurdish land, and big enough to sponsor a talk by Clare Short at the Labour conference. However, it asked for £400,000 to stop it sacking workers in Manchester in early 1999. Possibly ABB was feeling the pinch: a few months previously (October 1998) it was fined $50m by the European commission for taking part in a price-fixing cartel in heating pipes. In Manchester ABB works on railway rolling stock, so the quarter of a million pounds it bagged is another illustration of the way the "privatised" rail industry relies on public subsidy.

Some of Labour's favourite drug and chemical firms have, despite fantastic profitability, also "signed on". Albright & Wilson – who used to pay money to Jack Cunningham – got £668,000 to save jobs in Whitehaven in summer 1998. GM giant Zeneca bagged £231,000 in Stockton on Tees in early 1998. Merck Sharpe and Dohme – which usually has a stall at Labour conferences – got half a million pounds for its Newcastle operation at the start of 1998. Bayer got just over half a million in Bridgend in the first quarter of 1998. Monsanto topped the list with an award of £1,428,000 for its plastics operation in Ayr at about the time Labour were elected.

Privatised firms who have turned years of public investment to their own advantage also join the queue for benefits. Scottish Power slashed jobs after privatisation, though before the election it managed to create one board level post for Labour's Baroness Jay. Without shame the company asked for and received three quarters of a million pounds for "assistance" to "safeguard jobs" in late 1996. In the same post-election euphoria, the government gave BT half a million pounds in Lanarkshire. Early the next year BT received another £500,000 for its Glasgow operation.

Banks and finance firms are not shy to ask for benefits either. Norwich Union bagged £185,000 in early 1999 (Liverpool); Clydesdale Bank got £200,000 in spring 1998; Abbey National received £1,950,000 at the start of 1998 (Liverpool again). These look like small change compared to Midland Bank, which was awarded £30,000,000 (sic) to set up shop in Lanarkshire at the beginning of this year. In a smaller sum, but a bigger shock, Thomas De La Rue – part of the Camelot Consortium running the lottery – suddenly felt short of cash and had to be given £900,000 worth of benefits to stop it sacking staff in Sunderland in summer 1996.

POLICE 5

Dirty money

POLICE and politicians condemned the *News of the World*'s payment of £25,000 to the key witness at the trial of paedophile Gary Glitter. But the police should examine their own murky history of tainted payments to prosecution witnesses.

In February 1990 Raphael Rowe, Michael Davis and Randolph Johnson were jailed for life for a series of violent robberies in which one victim was killed — the so-called M25 murder case.

The key prosecution witness was Norman Duncan, who shared a house with the three in Sydenham, south-east London. He denied taking part in the robberies but admitted to police that he had stolen the car involved in the murder and had torched two other vehicles involved in what the court heard was "an orgy of violence" near the M25.

What was never revealed at the trial was that Duncan was a police informer. As well as not prosecuting him for these confessions, incredibly Surrey police also agreed — before Duncan gave his statements naming the three — that he would be paid £10,000 reward money offered by the *Daily Mail*. On the day he gave a second statement, the police also gave him £300 in cash.

At the men's failed appeal in 1993, they learned that reward money had been paid for information. But their lawyers' attempts to find out more to help prove the men's innocence were blocked by crown "public interest immunity' (PII) certificates — gagging orders keeping the vital evidence secret. It was not until March this year, six years later, that the secrecy orders were lifted by the courts at the instigation of the criminal cases review commission, which has now sent the case back to the court of appeal.

That appeal is not likely to be heard until the new year — probably at about the time the European court of human rights rules on whether or not the three were denied a fair trial because the prosecution withheld this key information. The European commission on human rights has already ruled that the three were denied justice.

Rowe, Davis and Johnson have always maintained their innocence and attracted an influential body of support, not least because eyewitnesses described two white assailants and one black. Rowe, Davis and Johnson are all black. Despite the fact that the robbers wore balaclavas, two of the eyewitnesses described one of the white attackers as having blue eyes and fair hair — just like Norman Duncan.

Unfair cop

THE two young black victims of a race attack in South Wales, who were themselves arrested and charged rather than their white assailants, had been hoping for an explanation of the police complaints' authority (PCA) decision to discipline only one police officer involved in the fiasco (*Eye* 987).

But they should not have held their breath. Letters giving detailed reasons to the families reveal that where there was a conflict of evidence between the South Wales police officers' accounts and that of the two young men, Marcus Walters and Francisco Borg, the PCA has accepted that of the officers.

Walters and Borg might have ended up in jail but for the fact that closed circuit television showed they were the victims not the perpetrators of crime. A gang of white men, one with a pit-bull terrier, is seen to attack their car, throwing a bike at the windscreen and to smash the side window to get at them.

Only one of the white racists was arrested at the scene, but both Marcus and Francisco were arrested and charged with violent disorder. Francisco had so much CS gas sprayed in his face, it also contaminated Marcus when they were thrown into the back of a police van. For eight months they had the threat of the trial and conviction hanging over them. The charges were only dropped after the judge watched the CCTV video at the start of their trial.

After pressure from Hilary Brown of Butetown Citizens Advice Bureau, Cardiff, who had taken up Marcus and Francisco's case, two other white men were eventually arrested and charged. Known racists, two were jailed and a third given 120 hours' community service for what the judge agreed was a racially motivated attack.

Yet the PCA has found no fault in the arrests, detention or treatment of Marcus and Francisco. It is critical only of police failing to take control at the scene and over delay in the later investigation and in arresting the white assailants. One officer is being charged with neglect of duty and discreditable conduct and four others are to receive a ticking off – an admonishment of words of advice.

Mrs Brown says: "I cannot believe the PCA watched the same tapes as we did." The tapes will be seen in the civil courts when Marcus and Francisco bring an action for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution.

Just Fancy That 2

WEEK after week the *Sunday Times* (£1.10) continues its Rip Off Britain campaign, highlighting multinationals that sell goods in the UK at higher prices than in adjacent countries, and don't even pay much by way of corporation tax to the British exchequer.

Isn't it about time the *ST* turned its attention its own parent, News Corporation, a huge multinational which pays virtually no tax anywhere in the world?

For that matter the paper could even have a go at itself. In the Irish Republic (where there's more competition) the *Sunday Times* permanently retails at IR£1.00, including the VAT which Dublin levies on all newspapers. That's the equivalent of roughly 80p sterling, including tax.

But don't hold your breath. When the paper recently exposed a telephone rip-off, claiming that companies using national rate 0870 numbers would be left with red faces after BT introduced a half price national tariff, the *ST* forgot to mention that one of the biggest corporate users of 0870 numbers is... Sky TV.

"You realise, Timpson, that thorough decency is a sacking offence?"

RETAIL

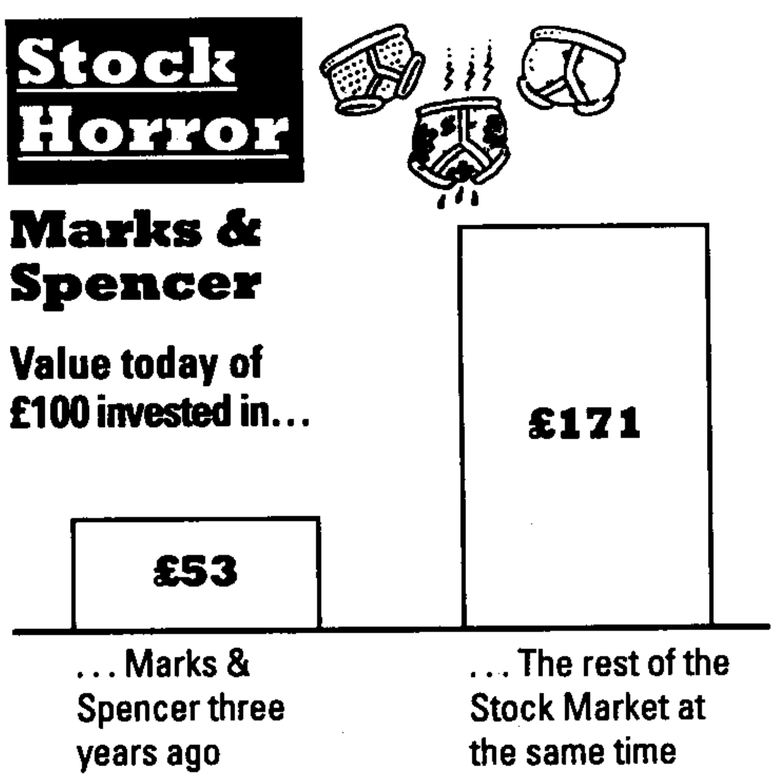
Low Marks

MARKS & SPENCER is desperate to win back the loyalty of customers and suppliers and stem its plummeting profits.

So desperate it has sent its suppliers a gushing invitation urging them to reward their own staff and customers with millennial Marks & Spencer gift vouchers, from £1 to £25.

Unfortunately this crass invitation to share in M&S's "success" has been sent to several suppliers whose contracts with the company have just been terminated after many – in some cases 30 – years of loyal service.

Factories in some of the most deprived areas of Britain will have to close; thousands will lose their jobs; and despite M&S's once-proud boast that most of its products were manufactured in the UK, production is being switched to North Africa, Asia and other countries where people work long hours for a pittance.


Stock Horror
Marks & Spencer
Value today of £100 invested in...
£53
£171
... Marks & Spencer three years ago
... The rest of the Stock Market at the same time

In the City

LORD ARCHER is not the only leading Tory fundraiser and libel writ waver undergoing déjà vu all over again. So is would-be peer Michael Ashcroft — who still has party leader William Hague's total backing.

Shares in Tyco International — which acquired Ashcroft's ADT in 1997 — have been in free fall recently. The shares fell on Wall Street by a third from a peak of $53 in October to as low as $30 earlier this month. The shares have since recovered to $43.

The fall has wiped more than $10bn off Tyco's market value. It has also substantially trimmed Ashcroft's personal wealth as he became a major share and option holder on the Tyco reverse deal. Ashcroft, a non-executive Tyco director, owns some three million shares so the fall has so far cost him around £20m.

The slide is due to fears about Tyco's accounting practices, in particular regarding its acquisition lead growth. Tyco has denied artificially boosting profits. By remarkable coincidence similar queries were raised about ADT when Ashcroft was in charge.

Luckily for Ashcroft he managed to mitigate some of the paper losses by selling Tyco shares worth around £63m since last year.

THE trials and tribulations of Kevin Maxwell's US business comeback with telecommunications venture Telemonde have not been accomplished without association with some colourful characters.

One of those on the fringes of the Telemonde scene waiting for the pay-off from a NASDAQ listing has been Alex Dann, like Maxwell well if not fondly remembered by the Serious Farce Office. The SFO failed in a 1993 prosecution of Dann and his penny share promoter associate Malcolm Johnson. They were charged but acquitted of defrauding creditors of Duralite Manufacturing.

Another player on the Telemonde scene has been Australian Ian Rice, best known in recent times for his links to Russian deals of dubious merit. Like Cap'n Bob, Maxwell Jnr has a fondness for Russian deals.

With the aid of friendly coverage in the *Sunset Times* and the *Sunday Torygraph*, the son and chief assistant to the great pension pillager has been hyping Telemonde since May. But as the much delayed prospectus admits, the company still has substantial financial problems and has defaulted on debts of more than £50m.

Kevin Maxwell hopes to resolve that by raising finance on the strength of a hyped share price enabling him to make takeovers for paper and place more shares with American investors for whom the name Maxwell does not have the terminal connotation it has in Britain.

No doubt Maxwell hopes US investors and regulators will be less concerned about the SFO's failed prosecutions or the somewhat contradictory verdict of a high court judge that he lied to and defrauded bankers in a bid to prevent the collapse of Maxwell Communications.

FUGITIVE spiv Andrew Regan is conducting a propaganda campaign to influence the SFO's policy towards his possible extradition from Monaco on theft charges. A sympathetic interview with the *Sunday Torygraph* (21 November) is clearly an opening shot in the campaign.

Regan and his advisers believe they can influence the ruler of the city state, Prince Rainier, to be hostile to any extradition request on the grounds that it would send a bad message to all the expatriate tax exiles who make Monaco their home. But why should Rainier care about one British spiv? And would it not generate more bad publicity for Monaco if it sheltered a man wanted for a £2.4m theft?

Regan may also want to cut a deal with the SFO whereby he can come back to Britain, obtain bail and (crucially) face a separate trial rather than be tried with the two Co-Operative Wholesale Society executives he is accused of corrupting with the £2.4m. That would give him a better chance than sharing the dock.

The SFO has yet to start extradition proceedings. There is a treaty with Monaco although Regan's advisers seem to believe it may be arguable as a fall back position that it does not apply. But who would want to spend forever never being able to leave the tiny principality? The SFO is expected to start the ball rolling by January, when the ex-CWS are due in court, if no deal has been agreed with Regan by then. Meanwhile look for more Regan interviews and more threats to incriminate the great and the good at his former advisers Hambros.

RUMOURS among City bean counters suggest that all is far from well between the Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand camps of the merged PWC accounting giant. Costs are said to be too high, exceeding budgets by almost £200m; and profits less than expected from the PW side of the partnership. With the consultancy side looking to break free, and other non-audit divisions like corporate finance unhappy, it may well be that there will be changes at the top with the Coopers side taking charge.

SUGGESTIONS that John aka Giovanni di Stefano may be the saviour of the doomed Ellington pit in Northumberland would be laughable if they were not a cruel deception on the miners and their families. This friend of Serb war criminal "Arkan" is a conman with a history of fraud, bounced cheques and broken promises. He also faces arrest if he returns to Britain. Di Stefano ran a fraudulent bank for which he was jailed. He is wanted for fraudulent trading at the collapsed Sandhurst Assets. The supposed Ellington purchaser is a US company, Sandhurst Assets. He failed to complete the purchase of fellow fugitive Asil Nadir's Industrial Bank of Cyprus, but not before he had used a number of rubber IBC cheques in California. He failed to take over Hollywood studio MGM. He failed to buy Scottish soccer club Dundee earlier this year. Sadly for the Ellington miners di Stefano is a bad joke.

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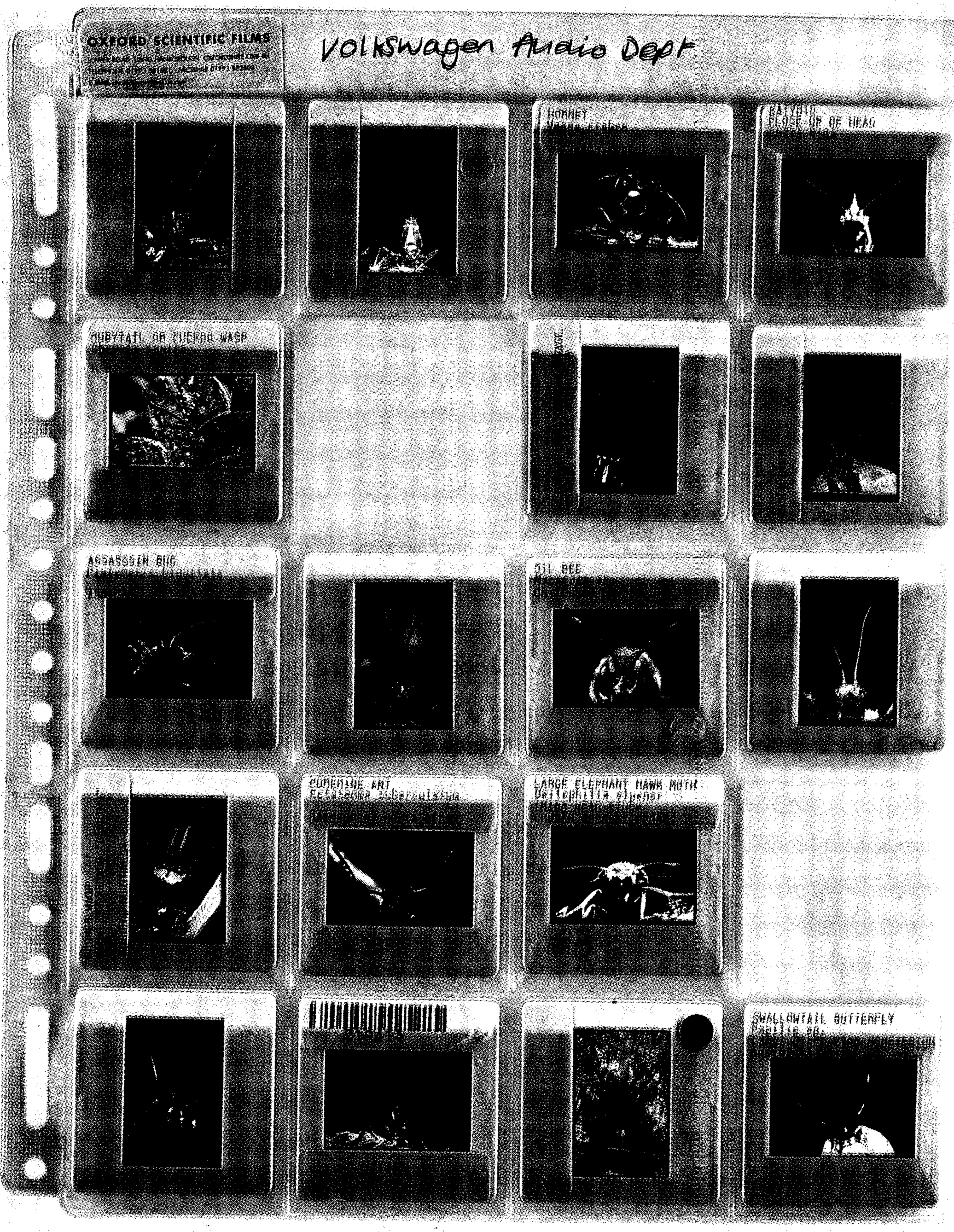

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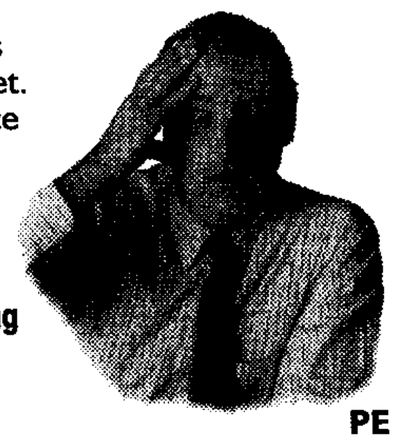

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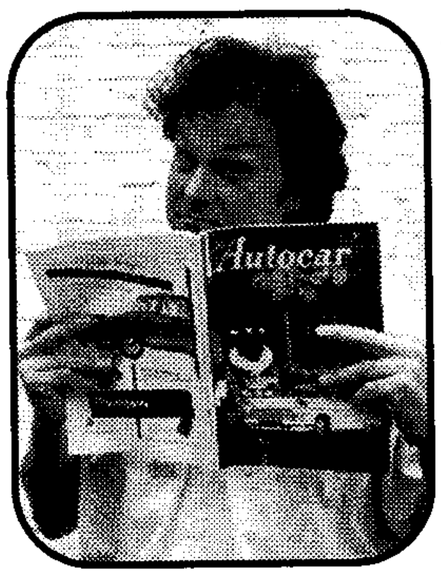

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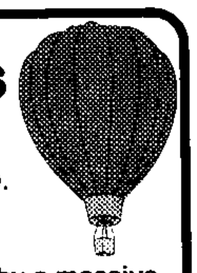

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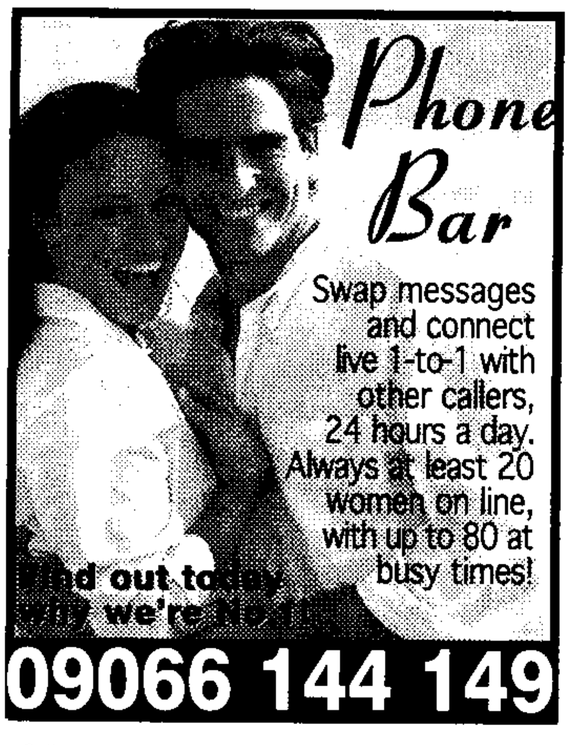
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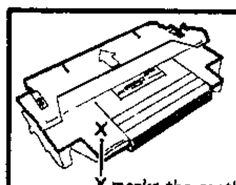

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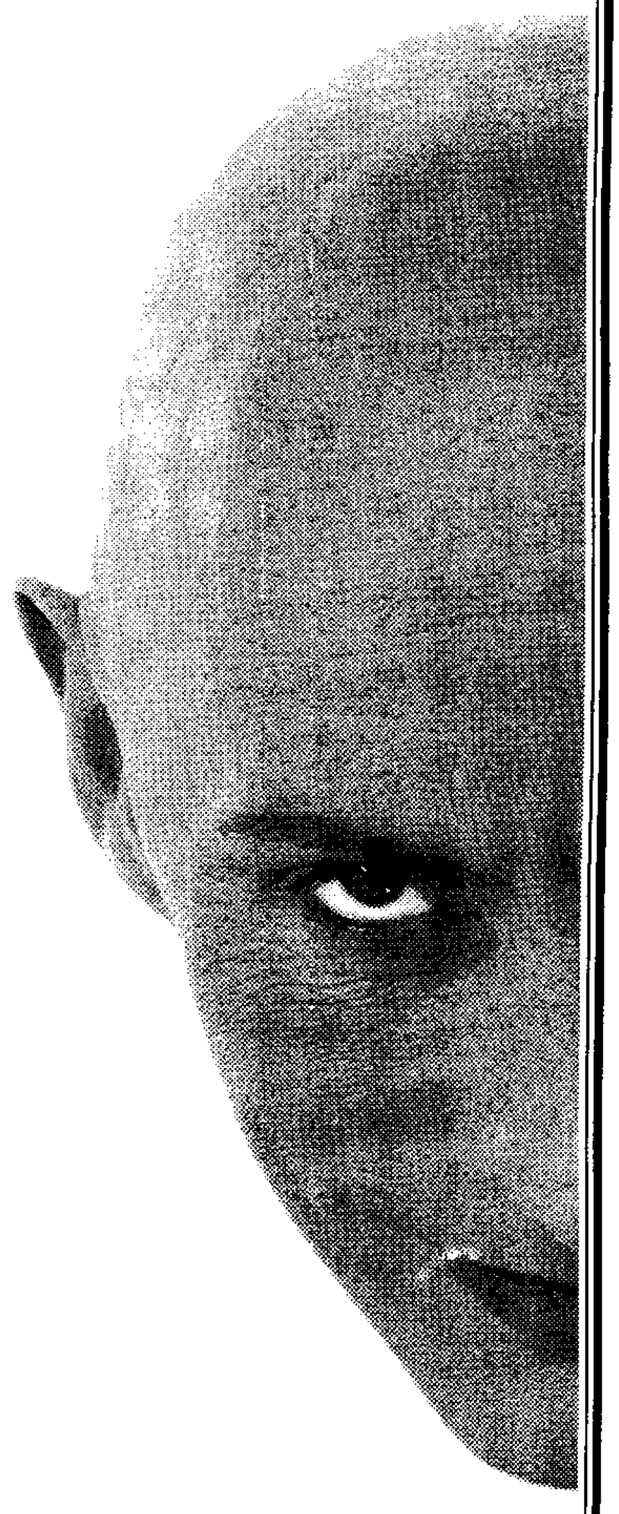

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SPEECHWRITING by Mitch Murray – see page 31...

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DRAMA STUDENT needs funds to complete. Desperate. 34415682, 09 01 26 Abbey National.

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IMPOVERISHED EX-STUDENT – £15,000 debts, low paid job. Please help. Box 2690.

ONLY CHILD NEEDS blood relatives. Nearly too old mum needs loft conversion for room (£5000) and same to clear debts before baby. Please help before too late. Box 2590.

BULLIED AND INTIMIDATED out of job I loved. Badly need time to restore sanity, so I can support my family again. Anything appreciated. Thank you. 30-98-28, 0550007. Box 2490.

£100,000 needed. Single mother, no income. Abbey National 110568778. Please help.

A TRADE EX-SOLDIER needs £20K/work for fresh start after HER. Tel: 0797 7 211171.

RESTAURANT OWNER requires equipment to prevent mobile phone pollution. Cash reward. Box 2390.

25, TERMINAL brain tumour. Please help me live before I die. Details: azymay@hotmail.com. Cooperative Bank 08-92-73, 88018616.

DESPERATE, MATURE student. Fought hard and honestly against difficult background to get this far. £10,000 debts will prevent course completion. Anything appreciated: 60-15-51, 22199160.

RAPE VICTIM desperate to move from scene. Please help! Natwest 60-15-51, 22156356.

STEINER PROJECT Lancaster, needs £100,000 for school building. Donations welcome. NatWest 01-54-90, 220 711 99.

ROUGH JUSTICE. Won case against unfair dismissal. Our honour and position restored, but His Honour forces high legal bills. Sympathetic donations please. 7372713 at Lloyds 30-00-05 or Box 2089. Thanks.

SOLICITOR, (27), wants to revive William James' and Aldous Huxley's bright ideas in an already conceived fiction novel based around 31/12/99 Y2K bug crime. Would love to publish before millennium but need £6000 for all debts to leave work. Generous repayment if fortune smiles at me. Thanks. 20-48-42, 20811998.

£5000 NEEDED urgently. Will pay back next year. Can you help? Box 2090.

SEEKING SPONSORSHIP for arduous trek, Patagonia, in aid of mentally handicapped people. Cheques payable to 'MENCAP PROMOTIONS' gratefully received: Watersmeeting, Harwood-in-Teesdale, DL12 0YB. Thankyou.

STUDENT PROMISES any money sent will be spend on adventure, excitement and laughter. Natwest 54-21-47, 21998566.

SANTA WANTED to give our baby son a Christmas. Family desperate after debts of Bar vocational course. Thankyou. Girobank 72-60-01, 65135603.

MANIC DEPRESSIVE, well for 3 years, just graduated engineer, crippled by debts. Lloyds 30-00-05, 1099225 for fresh start. Thank you.

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CENTRAL LONDON – charismatic, professional male, 50s, slim, intelligent, solvent, fun – seeks younger similar lady friend/lover, who respects own space. Box 1590.

STATUESQUE, ELEGANT linguist, circa 1950's, requires single, tall male who 'speaks her language'. Berkshire. Box 0990.

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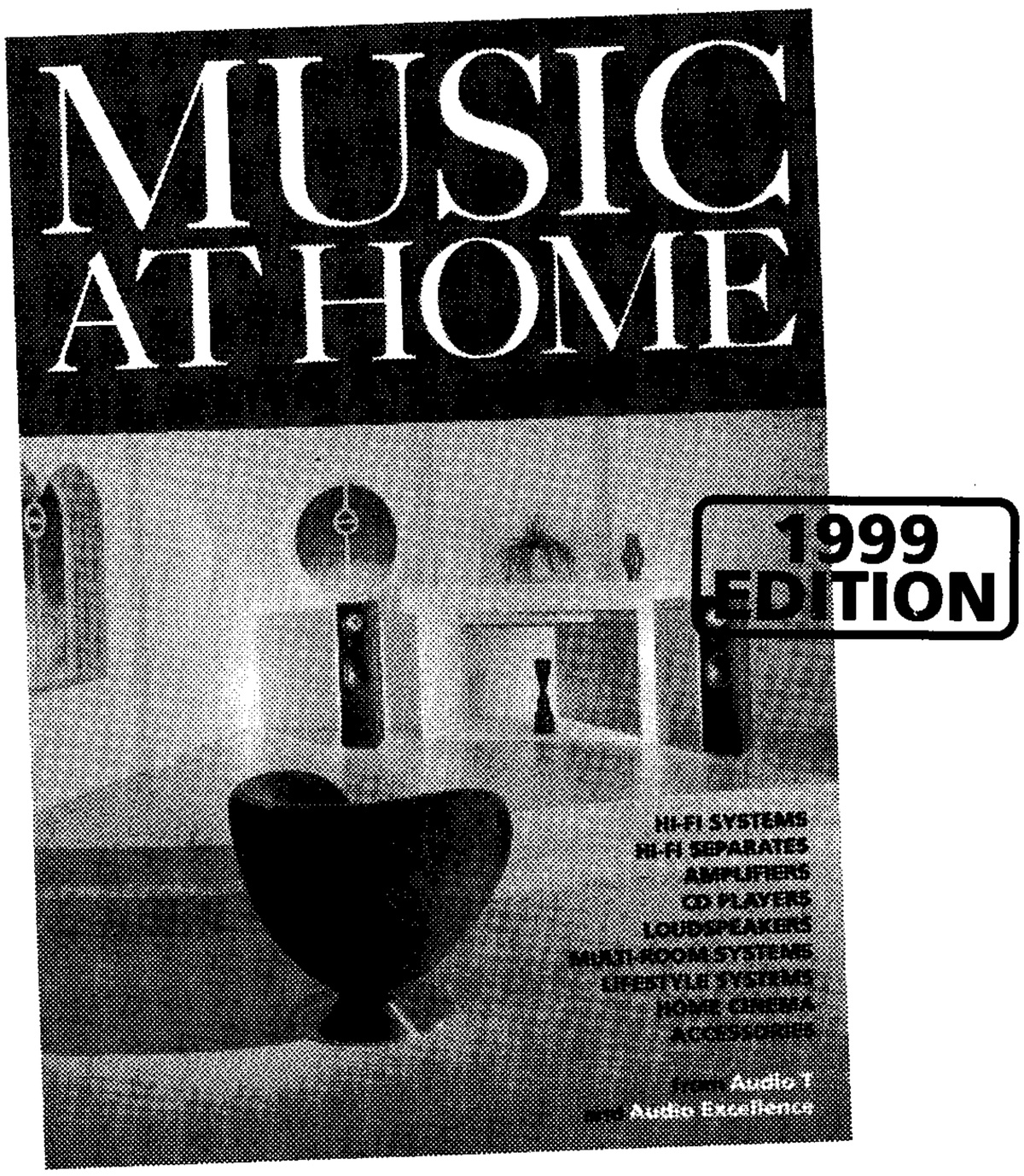

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